LIFE OF

THE BLESSED VIRGIN

BY

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ADAPTED BY

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LIFE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

PART I.

THE COMING OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

CHAPTER I.

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD.

MARY'S true greatness consists in having been chosen to be the Mother of God. This sublime privilege, pre-eminently her own and shared by no other creature, elevates her to an eminence more exalted than has ever been granted to any other created being. It raises her up near to the Godhead, and constitutes her the channel of many blessings in the Old Law and in the New. Yet, not of course with regard to her own person, but in relation to her divine Son. Mary is the wonder of wonders, a new creation, a peculiar spirit world. What man is in the order of nature, what Jesus Christ is in the order of glory, such is Mary in the order of grace. She is the crown, the high and middle point of the order of salvation.

Mother of God! St. Peter Damian, in his eloquent sermon on the birth of the Blessed Virgin, thus gives expression to his exalted conception of the dignity of Mary's motherhood:

"In what words may mortal man be permitted to pronounce the praises of her who herself brought forth that Divine Word who lives for all eternity? Where can tongue be found holy and pure enough to eulogize her who

bore the Author of all created things, whom the elements praise and obey with fear and trembling? If we wish to extol a martyr's heroism, to recount his acts of virtue, to describe his devotion to his Saviour's cause and honor, facts which belong to the province of human experience supply us with words and circumstances. But when we undertake to write the glories of the Blessed Virgin, we enter upon new, unknown ground—on a subject transcending all human effort. We fail to find words suitable to portray her sublime mysteries and prerogatives.

"What power of intellect is able to explain the mystery of the Creator's coming forth from His own creature?

"In the virginal womb of the humble maiden is conceived the Eternal, He whom the whole universe cannot contain. In the arms of an earthly mother, the Infinite lies a helpless babe. Yet He it is who, equal to the Father, supplies existence to all creation, who by His omnipotence and authority stills the storms at sea, supplies to the mighty rivers their inexhaustible sources of water, and yet is content to be nourished with the scanty sustenance that His lowly Mother can supply. No human discourse can be found worthy and competent to describe the glories of her from whom the Redeemer between God and man was pleased to assume His sacred body and blood."

All the great and glorious deeds performed in God's honor and to man's benefit cannot be compared with what Mary has done for us.

The prophets have foretold the coming of Christ, angels proclaimed in tuneful numbers His birth in Bethlehem, the holy Precursor pointed Him out to the world and prepared the way before Him, the apostles have preached Him to the nations, the sons of the Church in all ages have preached His sacred word, administered

His sacraments and dispensed His mysteries. But Mary has given us the Redeemer Himself, formed out of her own flesh and blood. With unfailing love and care, and amid privation and toil, she nurtured Him and brought Him up that He might become a Victim for our sins. Standing under His cross at Calvary, she did not spare her only begotten Son. She consented to His painful and shameful death. As she stood silently by the side of her Son, who was a just and maltreated God, her heart pierced with the sword of grief, she offered Him up, as well as herself, for our ransom.

Intimately combined with this divine motherhood are all those prerogatives which the nature of so sublime a dignity demands and contains within itself. The most exalted, Godlike sanctity is the foundation and indispensable embellishment of one called to be the Mother of God.

If St. John the Baptist was enriched with such abundant grace and sanctified even before his birth in order to be a fit precursor of the Messias; if St. Paul was made a vessel of election in order to become a worthy apostle of the Gentiles, what ineffable graces must have been bestowed by God on the Blessed Virgin in order to render her a becoming Mother of the divine Son! Necessarily she was full of grace, a noble production of divine omnipotence and goodness. Thus beautifully does St. Anselm in his writings on the Immaculate Conception speak of the motherhood of Mary: "It was eminently just and proper that the creature chosen to be the Mother of God should beam with a lustre of purity far beyond anything that we can conceive as existing in any other creature under heaven. For it was to her that the heavenly Father had decreed to give His only begotten Son whom He loved as Himself, and to give Him in such a mysterious manner that He should be at the same time the Son of

God and the Son of the Virgin Mary. She indeed should be purity itself, whom the divine Son of God would select as His Mother. Pure, too, should she be whom the Holy Ghost had chosen to be the means of bringing forth that Second Person of the Blessed Trinity from whom He Himself proceedeth."

If Solomon employed such high and costly art, lavished such untold wealth, and devoted so much time and attention in building a becoming dwelling-place for the Ark of the Covenant which was to contain the simple Tables of the Law, what may we not believe would God do to enrich and embellish for his only beloved Son, not simply a dwelling-place but a very mother—a mother from whose sacred person were to be taken the elements of that body which He was to assume for our sake, the earliest nourishment which was to be converted into that blood soon to be shed upon the cross for our salvation.

Between the divine Son and the Mother of God exist the most intimate and sacred relations. There is no more important duty, nor one more in accordance with the laws of nature, than the duty which children owe to parents, who, next to God, are the authors of their existence. Now this common bond uniting so tenderly and yet so firmly the child to the authors of its existence, existed the more powerfully between Jesus as true man, and Mary, His Mother, because it was not shared by a father, but reflected entirely upon the virgin mother who alone conceived and bore Him. Therefore He who had given the divine command, "Honor thy father and thy mother," because He wished to be counted as a man, fulfilled in a high degree His own law, and practised filial piety and gratitude in ample measure towards her whom He had chosen to be His mother, and whom He delighted to honor and love. Thus the extent of the treasures lavished upon Mary may be gathered from the generosity and gratitude

of an infinite, glorious, and just God, who desired to pay so glorious a debt to her who most lovingly afforded to Him His earthly existence. If for a drink of cold water given in His name to a poor person He promises a torrent of glory in heaven, what an ocean of grace He must have poured out upon her who supplied blood to His veins!

Whilst contemplating this greatest of Thy wonder-works, O Lord, permit me at the same time to pour out before Thee a prayer of deep thanksgiving for having thus vouchsafed to adorn and place before the admiring gaze of heaven and earth a mother endowed with such exalted dignity and filled with such heavenly grace. Thou hast condescended to unite to Thyself this highly favored maiden. Thou hast exalted her in order that she might co-operate with Thee in Thy greatest of works, namely, the redemption and sanctification of the human family.

Whilst pondering this profound mystery of Thy omnipotence, O Most Blessed Trinity, and discovering the close union between Thee and the maiden of Nazareth, my soul is forced to render to her a homage only a degree below that which is due to Divinity itself. I learn to consider her the holiest and most exalted person, as the one most deserving through all time of Thy infinite love and the worthiest of Thy sublime greatness. I learn to look upon her as one who surpasseth both men and angels in dignity, worth, and sanctity. From my heart of hearts, I rejoice at this eminent distinction that Thou hast been pleased to confer upon Thy immaculate Mother.

THE MOTHER OF GOD AND CHRISTIANITY.

A belief in the divine motherhood of Mary constitutes for us men the foundation and the life and soul of all the other mysteries of Christianity. Such belief is the very way that leads to Christ Himself.

Take from us the mystery of Mary's divine motherhood, and where shall we find the Incarnation of Christ, where the great work of the Atonement, where the justification and sanctification of mankind?

All these mysteries are hypothecated on the birth of the Son of God from the womb of the Virgin Mary. Hence we can say: The chaste bosom of the Blessed Virgin is the source of Christianity, because it is the origin of the Son of God becoming man. Hence the Church of God has ever displayed an undying zeal and devotion in defence of this great prerogative of Mary, her divine maternity, and in defence of her glorious title of Mother of God.

For a poor young maiden, a carpenter's bride, to be considered the Mother of God was always a stumbling-block for false, proud piety, and a test for genuine faith.

Foretold as she was by the prophets of old, realized and verified later on, throughout the ages of Christianity, she stands forth as the veritable sign, given by God Himself, of truth and election; a virgin who conceived and brought forth a Son whose name "shall be called Emmanuel" (Is. vii. 14). In the early ages of Christianity, the apostate Emperor of Rome, Julian, made to the Christians of those days the significant reproach: "You Christians never cease to call Mary the Mother of God"—"*Vos Mariam Deiparam vocare non cessatis*" (Cyril, lib. viii. *adv. Julian.*)

ACT OF VENERATION.

Christian reader, from the bottom of your heart concur in this holy truth of the divine motherhood of Mary! On this truth rests our faith in Christ, in His Incarnation, and in our own redemption. On this truth is founded all the trust and all the homage which we delight to entertain

and show to our dearest Queen. Let this faith in the divine motherhood of Mary be the guiding star that will guide us both, you and me, in the composition and the study of this work written in her honor. Animated with this belief, filled with admiration and glowing with childlike gratitude, let us honor the holy Mother of God while we pour out before her, as the expression of our heartfelt sentiments, the glorious eulogy of St. Epiphanius (*In Orat. de B. V.*): "Poor and feeble am I to undertake the task of showing forth the overpowering rays of thy dazzling brightness, O holy Mother of God, or to describe thy ineffable qualities, the mystery of heaven and earth, the miraculous nature of the union between God and man, of the redemption of man by God. Thou causest the powers of heaven to wonder. The very angels, cherubim and seraphim, are stricken with mute astonishment. The whole court of the heavenly host were overpowered with awe and seized with holy fear and trembling when they saw Him, whose dwelling-place is heaven, pass through thee to earth. With wonder they looked down from heaven upon thee, and in thy sacred person recognized a divine throne upon which sat their Creator, the same who is without beginning or end. They saw Him descend from His celestial throne above the clouds and seek shelter and repose within thy sacred bosom.

"Ever-blessed Virgin! Pure dove! Bride of heaven! Temple and throne of the Godhead! Thou holdest Christ as the bright Sun on heaven and earth. Fair summer cloud, that sendest Christ to the earth, as the flash of lightning to illumine its darkness! Cloud in the heavens, thou who sendest to the earth the hidden thunderbolts of the Holy Ghost, and who pourest out over its arid surface the refreshing showers of the Holy Spirit, that its soil may bring forth fruits of saving faith! Holy Mother of God, ever virgin, who hast brought forth Him who once

in Paradise created Adam out of the slime of the earth! Thou art Mother of God, for thou hast brought forth the Word made flesh. Thou art the Mother of God, for thou hast conceived the Divine Word reduced to the form and condition of a servant. Thou art the Mother of God, for thou hast conceived God the Word and brought Him forth, the Word made flesh. Thou art the Mother of God, for thou alone hast borne the only begotten Son of God. Thou hast not borne a finite god, or one formed only from thy flesh, but the eternal God Himself, who before thee, O Virgin! and before all men, is the admirable treasure of the Church. Those who can comprehend this stupendous mystery, O wonderful Virgin! salute thee as being at once priest and altar; for thou bearest the table, and hast given unto us Christ, the heavenly Bread, to the remission of our sins. The angels censured Eve, but now they glorify thee, who hast raised up our fallen mother, and sent to heaven poor afflicted man that was once driven from Paradise. For through thee O holy Virgin! the gulf between God and man has been bridged over and enmity allayed. Through thee peace has come into the world. Through thee men have become angels. Through thee the cross has been made to shine forth a beacon of hope and safety to all men. Through thee death has been conquered and hell ravaged. Through thee the idols of paganism have fallen, the divine teachings have been diffused. Through thee have we learned to know the Son of God, for thou it was, O blessed Virgin, who bore Our Lord Jesus Christ, whom all angels and all men adore."

CHAPTER II.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN PREDESTINED AND SELECTED FROM ALL ETERNITY AS THE MOTHER OF GOD.

"IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him: and without Him was made nothing that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men: and the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. . . . That was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came into His own and his own received Him not. But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John i.).

THE DIVINE PLAN OF THE INCARNATION.

During all eternity, the ever-blessed and adorable Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, had dwelt in unspeakable glory and happiness. In order to share His being with other creatures and to make them happy in the knowledge and love of their Creator, the most high God resolved to call into existence out of nothing a visible creation. Of this earthly creation man was the crown and masterpiece, created as he was after the image

and likeness of an infinitely perfect God. From all eternity, this creation had existed in the mind of God. From all eternity, too, was known to the omniscient God the sad fault and consequent estrangement from Him of the first human pair. From all eternity the Son of God was pleased and resolved to assume human nature, to offer Himself up, out of voluntary love, as a victim of sacrifice for the sins of the world. From all eternity, God the Father had so loved the world, that he sent His only-begotten Son, that all who believe in Him may be saved. (John iii. 16.) Now as the great work of Christ's incarnation and man's redemption was predestined from all eternity, it necessarily follows that the mode and plan of these stupendous mysteries must also have been likewise predestined from all eternity, as well as the manner in which Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, was to take upon Himself, "in the fulness of time," our human nature.

Christian reader, raise the eyes of your soul above all time and space; exert yourself to understand and realize, to the very depths of your heart and intellect, the sublime mystery of Mary's election by heaven, of her inseparable connection with the Incarnation, and of the exalted dignity attaching to her sacred person by reason of this choice of heaven. The Holy Catholic Church seeks to make this truth intelligible to you, when she applies the words of eternal wisdom to the Blessed Virgin, and puts into the mouth of her whom we honor as the Seat of wisdom the following words of the Holy Ghost:

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was made. The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived: neither had the fountains of waters as yet sprung out. The mountains with their huge bulk had not as yet

been established: before the hills I was brought forth: He had not yet made the earth, nor the rivers, nor the poles of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I was there: when with a certain law and compass He enclosed the depths: when He established the sky above, and poised the fountains of waters: when He compassed the sea with its bounds, and set a law to the waters that they should not pass their limits: when He balanced the foundations of the earth. I was with Him forming all things: and was delighted every day, playing before Him at all times." (Prov. viii. 22–31.)

These words of the Holy Ghost are aptly and truthfully applied by the Church to the Blessed Virgin. What an exalted idea they afford us of the important part given to her by the eternal Father in the design of the Incarnation! Rejoice then, Christian reader, with a child's grateful feelings; thank your loving God for the wise and beautiful selection He made when He chose Mary to be His Mother.

THE PLAN OF THE ATONEMENT.

Again, Christian reader, learn in your heart of hearts and bear in mind that the Son of God had imposed on Himself the task of redeeming fallen humanity. Remember, too, that this redemption of sinful men could be effected by no better plan, nor more in accordance with the decrees of the divine wisdom, mercy, and justice of God, and to the greater sanctification of man than through the incarnation of the Son with the co-operation of a daughter of men. Mary was chosen, therefore, from all eternity, not only to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, but also to be a co-operator, to fill a position and to discharge a special duty in the work of the Atonement. Do not grow weary, Christian reader, in weighing and studying

this sublime truth; otherwise you will never succeed in rightly comprehending the deep significance of Mary's part in your salvation and sanctification.

Almighty God could, in His wisdom, have chosen a thousand different ways to redeem the world. But He was pleased to do it by means of the incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

As far as it is possible for human intellect to understand, and as far as it is allowable for us to speak of the unfathomable mysteries of Divine Wisdom, we may venture to explain that God was pleased to adopt this plan of a visible and personal atonement, for the four following reasons—reasons, too, which serve to explain the share of Mary in the great work:

In the first place, God wished by this outward, visible, and personal plan, to bring man back again to the invisible.

So far away from the spiritual had sin and error led misguided man, that he had distorted visible things. The very objects that should serve to lead him to the knowledge of the one true God he had converted into gods themselves. St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, tells us in his Epistle to the Romans (i. 21–26):

"Because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God, or given thanks: but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened: For professing themselves to be wise they became fools. And they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds and of four-footed beasts and of creeping things. Wherefore God gave them up to the desires of their heart, unto uncleanness: to dishonor their own bodies among themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie: and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this cause

God delivered them up to shameful affections. For their women have changed the natural use into that use which is against nature."

So chained down were men to mere material views and notions, that they would never have accepted a purely spiritual Redeemer, whose teachings and example and whose atoning sacrifice they could not have heard and seen by their bodily ears and eyes. What infinite condescension; what love for man, on the part of a merciful God, thus to assume a visible form, thus to adapt Himself to our weakness, thus to advance towards us, meeting the creature in his own sphere, becoming like unto him in all things save sin! How could men fail to accept such a Redeemer? In order that this visible plan and this condescension of God might be plainly visible to men, that the Redeemer might be a visible though divine person, it was decreed that He should be born of a woman in a human manner, like any other man. Thus was Mary, our blessed Mother, predestined from all eternity in the all-wise plans of God. She was made a necessary condition to the realization of the plan of the Redemption.

In the second place, God wished to win the confidence of doubting man, to bring him back to confidence and hope, by means of a mild and condescending policy.

Hardly had Adam and Eve tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree in Paradise, when they felt a great and indescribable fear come upon them, and they endeavored to "hide themselves from the face of the Lord, amid the trees of Paradise." (Gen. iii. 8–10.) This same fear continued to haunt the hearts and souls of all men through all ages. The whole history of ante-Christian times is nothing but one continued story of blighted peoples, filled with fear and despondency. But now a merciful God wished to bring back frightened man to the enjoyment of that confidence such as animated the beloved disciple, John the

Evangelist, who reposed his head upon the bosom of Jesus; to that confiding trust of the children who played at the Saviour's knees; to that confiding trust which must have animated Magdalen when kissing His feet; to that confiding trust which must flow from His kind invitation: "Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." (Matt. xi. 28.) With thankful and exulting heart, O Christian, consider how a merciful God knew how to awaken this trust, and how He merits it at the hands of men. God comes to us as a child! On the grace-laden night of Christmas, the night of Christ's birth, the joyous message was first delivered to the fearful shepherds, and in the joyous words of the comforting angels: "Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people, for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. . . . And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in a manger." (Luke ii. 10–12.) St. Bernard, in a sermon on this beautiful passage of Scripture, thus speaks: "Why should you fear, O man? Because He comes? Yes, He comes; but not this time to judge the world, but to redeem it. Hence you have no excuse to say, like our first parents: 'I heard Thy voice and hid because I was afraid.' It was on this account, to dispel this fear of despair, that Christ was born a harmless child. For the crying of an innocent babe awakens compassion rather than dread in the heart of the listener or beholder. A kind and gentle maiden holds in her arms the tender limbs wrapped up in swaddling-garments. How then can you fear, O Christian!" (*In nativ. Dom.* serm. i.) Ah, no! Never will I fear with despairing fear, O tender Mother! Thou art my refuge and my hope. Show unto me Jesus, the fruit of thy chaste womb, O gentle, sweet, and tender Virgin Mary!

In the third place, God wished to free men from the dominion of the evils under which they groaned through the fall of a woman, by the intervention of a woman in the redemption and restoration.

"From the woman came the beginning of sin, and through her we all die." (Ecclus. xxv. 33.) Thus speaks the Holy Ghost. Hence it was eminently proper that according to the decrees of God the grace of restoration should come forth and we should all live. Eve had been conquered by Satan. Satan was conquered by Mary. God Himself could have crushed the serpent, or Satan, as He had already punished him at the time when this same serpent caused the great rebellion of pride in heaven, for which he was plunged into endless suffering. Or He could have punished him by means of man, the head of creation and of the human race, who himself was the victim of Satan.

But God was pleased to act otherwise. He punished the serpent through woman and her offspring. The divine sentence of punishment reads thus: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." (Gen. iii. 15.) Thus Mary was designed from all eternity to conquer the hellish serpent, and to win back, through her Son, for fallen man, peace, grace, love, and a hopeful expectancy of a happy eternity. O heroic Virgin! sprung from Juda's stock (tree), shelter thy children now and forever from the continual and destructive snares of hell.

In the fourth place, God wished to offer Himself as an infinite Victim of expiation to the offended majesty of an infinite God. According to St. Paul, the divine Son, at His entrance into this world, thus addressed His heavenly Father: "Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not: but a body Thou hast fitted to Me [that I might thus offer

Thee a sacrifice]. Behold I come, to do Thy will, O God." Again St. Paul adds: "In the which will, we are sanctified by the oblation of the body of Jesus Christ once [for all]." (Heb. x. 5, 9, 10.) Now this body, in which Our Saviour bore His dreadful sufferings and death, the same which bled on the cross, and which is continually kept on the altars of our churches and is every day offered up to the eternal Father as the most pleasing, worthy, and acceptable Victim, this body was formed from the sacred person of the Blessed Virgin. For that purpose was she set apart in the mind of God during all eternity, to fill this all-important and honorable position in the order of Christian sanctification.

Christian reader, may you learn to comprehend this profound mystery of the divine motherhood of the Virgin, the important bearing it has on the Incarnation, the Redemption, and the founding on earth of God's kingdom, the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church. But as I am too feeble to explain it, and you are too weak to understand it, let us, at least, in humble and grateful admiration, praise Divine Providence, not only because He permitted the benefit of redemption to come to us, but because He sent it to us in so salutary, consoling, and tender a manner, and because, also, He granted to Mary so important a share in the great work.

We will renew, confirm, and reduce to practice our love and homage to Mary, the choicest of God's creatures. For such at least is the devotion due to her as co-operator in our salvation, as Mother of God.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS FORETOLD BY THE PROPHETS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THE FIRST PROMISE.

IN the act of the creation of the world, God's plans began to unfold and develop themselves more immediately and fully. With these plans, by their disobedience, our first parents sadly and disastrously interfered. Then outraged Majesty appeared at once, to pronounce sentence upon the guilty pair. To the serpent who had tempted them He thus spoke: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, between her seed and thy seed. She shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." (Gen. iii. 15.)

Here we discover the paternal goodness of God. Hardly has the offence been committed, hardly has the punishment demanded by justice been inflicted, when a compassionate God permits the star of hope to rise above the dark horizon and cast its cheering rays of encouragement upon blighted man and the accursed earth. This star was a woman who would crush the devil's head, destroy his dominion over the world, and bring forth a new generation pleasing to God and hostile to the Evil One. Christian reader, raise your heart, your eyes, and your hands to Mary. She is the morning star of man's hope, the star that appeared first in the dismal morning of human history. She sailed through the lowering firmament during the tedious period of darkness, comforting, strengthening, and enlightening poor bewildered man pending his long estrangement from his Maker.

MARY'S KINGLY ANCESTORS.

In the wake of the comforting promise followed a cycle of centuries, with their natural historical occurrences, and with their countless sins of error and other miseries to man. But all through this darksome woof of time there ran a thread of shining gold; namely, the long and uninterrupted genealogical line of that "Seed," in other words, of that divine Son through whose power and merits the woman was to crush the enemy's head. From the loins of Seth, Adam's righteous son, this long line of ancestry ran, through a succession of patriarchs, prophets, and kings in Israel, reaching to the "fulness of time," and constituting a glorious tree of genealogy, such as no mortal king or emperor can boast of having possessed. And as the centuries rolled by, the desired star of hope grew plainer and brighter in the firmament, each year declaring itself more and more positively and surely to longing, watching men.

In glowing words of psalmistry, the Virgin's royal ancestor, King David, thus describes her glory. In spirit he beholds her loveliness, and cries out as did Abraham when he beheld the day of the Lord: "The queen stood on thy right hand, in gilded clothing; surrounded with variety." To the Virgin herself, his own exalted and noble daughter, he thus addresses himself:

"Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear, and forget thy people and thy father's house. And the king shall greatly desire thy beauty: for He is the Lord thy God, and Him they shall adore. And the daughters of Tyre with gifts, yea all the rich among the people, shall entreat thy countenance. All the glory of the king's daughter is within, in golden borders. Clothed round about with varieties. After her shall virgins be brought to the king: her neighbors shall be brought to thee.

They shall be brought with gladness and rejoicing: they shall be brought into the temple of the king. Instead of thy fathers, sons are born to thee: thou shalt make them princes over all the earth. They shall remember thy name throughout all generations. Therefore shall peoples praise thee forever, yea forever and ever." (Ps. xliv. 10–18.)

How beautifully and correctly is here outlined the image of her who, inspired by the Holy Ghost, said of herself, "all generations shall call me blessed"! (Luke ii. 48.)

SOLOMON'S CANTICLE.

This portion of Holy Scripture has always been considered by the Fathers as an appropriate and fitting apostrophe to the Mother of Christ. Holy Church in her trials and triumphs addresses it to the Mother of fair love and of blessed hope.

Thus through the mouth of Solomon does the Bridegroom speak of this sublime bride of the Holy Spirit:

"Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee. My spouse is a garden inclosed, a fountain sealed up. Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array? Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm; for love is strong as death." (Cant., *passim.*)

THE GREAT PROPHET OF THE INCARNATION.

Among the many prophets of the Old Law who foretold the coming of Christ, none proclaims so clearly and beautifully the miraculous maternity of Mary and the mysterious birth through her of Jesus Christ, as the powerful seer Isaias. Eight hundred years before the birth of the Blessed Virgin, he significantly writes: "Hear ye,

therefore, O house of David, . . . the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel" (Is. vii. 13, 14), that is to say, God with us. Again he tells us, still more definitely, who this Virgin's Son is: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. For a Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us, and the government is upon His shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God, the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace." (Is. ix. 2, 6.)

In order, Christian reader, to appreciate properly the verification of this prophecy thus pronounced eight hundred years before the event itself, and to comprehend its wonderful fulfilment, recall to your memory the words addressed by the Angel Gabriel to Mary in her lowly home at Nazareth. "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus," that is Saviour or Redeemer. "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father: and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever." (Luke i. 31, 32.)

THE NEW CREATION OR REGENERATION.

The sad and desolate seer of the unredeemed world, Jeremias the prophet, tells us of a new creation by God. In what shall this regeneration consist? "Thus saith the Lord. . . . The people found grace in the desert: Israel shall go to the place of his rest. . . . I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee. And I will build thee up again and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel. The Lord hath created a new thing upon the earth: A woman

shall compass a man." (Jer. xxxi. 2–4, 22.) Is it not in deed and in truth a new creation of the Almighty, peculiar in its very nature and above all natural laws, that a virgin should become a mother and conceive and encompass in her chaste womb her own Lord and Maker? Yet this new creation was foretold by Jeremias, the prophet, six hundred years previous.

THE PROPHET MICHEAS.

Among the lesser prophets, Micheas likewise, six hundred years before the event, designates the very place of election at which the longed-for Redeemer should be born of the Virgin Mary. "And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda; out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel, and His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity." Therefore will the people of Israel be given up for chastisement to their enemies, "even till the time wherein she that travaileth shall bring forth: and the remnant of his brethren shall be converted to the children of Israel." (Mich. v. 2, 3.) This woman who "travaileth" is Mary, the same who, by the birth of the Saviour, was to lead back and rescue from a condition of chastisement and banishment the rejected people; conducting them into the kingdom of peace and reconciliation.

These few but apt and important prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the election of Mary, and foretelling her virgin motherhood to the Redeemer, will be to her votaries a sufficient proof that she had been foretold. Moreover we must not, if we would, separate the Blessed Virgin from her divine Son. For everything among the ancient Israelites, every event in pagan history having a bearing on Christ Himself, points also to Mary from whom the promised Redeemer was to be born.

But not in words alone was Mary foretold. She, who was to be the Mother of God, of the Word made flesh, was also prefigured by a glorious succession of remarkable and striking prototypes. Sara, Rebecca, Judith, Esther, Abigail, and the mother of the Machabees, these grand women of the Old Testament, were all prototypes of that blessed among all women, the most holy Mary.

CHAPTER IV.

ST. JOACHIM AND ST. ANNE, THE PARENTS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

ST. ANNE, the mother of the Blessed Virgin, is one of those grand saints whose real merit and worth, God, for the wisest of purposes, makes known to us, only after their death. Holy Scripture does not even once mention her name. There is, however, to be found floating through history a wealth of oral tradition bearing upon these parents of the Blessed Virgin. Much of this, it is true, is lacking in proof, and some of it does not bear even the semblance of truth. Christian reader, I would fain offer to you for study and meditation nothing but what is true and reasonable.

Whatever I have gleaned from the most reliable sources, and what, according to the best authorities, are reliable and credible facts, I here impart to you with fidelity.

A GOD-FEARING COUPLE.

St. Anne was descended from the tribe of Juda, and a member of the royal line of King David. She was

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brought up in the fear of the Lord, and in her youth served her God with holy joy. When grown to womanhood, she was espoused to an equally God-fearing, God-loving husband, a young man of sublime moral character of the race of David. His name was Joachim, or Heli, and he lived near Nazareth.

This holy pair, selected by God to participate in the carrying out of His designs for the immediate preparation to the mystery of the Redemption, and to the manifestation of His great mercy, dwelt together in great purity of heart and perfection of soul, in the eyes of their Lord. Both were deeply penetrated with a vivid perception and appreciation of the Divine Goodness, as well as with a proper understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Hence they prayed to heaven night and day for the fulfilment of the divine promise. Their lives flew past in unspeakable simplicity, mildness, and humility. They divided into three parts the earnings of their industrious labor. One-third of these earnings they gave to the Temple of God at Jerusalem, for the maintenance of divine worship. The second portion they divided with great charity among the poor. The third portion they reserved for their daily sustenance and the maintenance and comfort of their household.

THE WAY OF SORROWS.

Divine Wisdom accomplishes its purposes sometimes gently and noiselessly, again with great outward manifestation of power. Quietly had it adorned the worthy couple with the noble virtues of chastity, piety, and charitable love of their neighbors. Now it was to send them severe tribulation; for genuine virtue proves its solidity and permanence in the fiery furnace of trial and affliction. The holy couple had lived for twenty years in

happy wedlock without being blessed with any offspring. This was indeed a severe trial, as will presently appear. Among the Jews in general, but more especially among those of the line of David, to be childless was looked upon as a disgrace, a curse, and a chastisement from heaven. Childless parents could no longer hope to be among the ancestors of the expected Messias. This exclusion acted as a discouragement to their hopes; it tried their piety and their standing among their neighbors and their kinsmen of the same tribe. They were, besides, condemned to live secluded in sorrow and to endure apparent disgrace and never-ending reproaches and humiliations.

In sincere humility, Joachim and Anne submitted to the divine will. Confidence in the goodness of God bore them up in their bitterest moments. True, the probability of their ever being blessed with an issue was rapidly declining, as they were advancing farther and farther into old age. Yet they continued to redouble their prayers and multiply their offerings to God in the hope of obtaining this grace, which was the wish of their hearts, from heaven. One day, after long prayers and abundant tears, St. Anne suddenly remembered having read in Holy Scripture that the mother of Samuel, who like herself was named Anne, had under similar circumstances made a vow that if she should be blessed with a child she would dedicate it to God. St. Anne followed her example. From the depth of her heart she uttered the self-same words pronounced by her saintly ancestress, who "made a vow saying: O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt look down and wilt be mindful of me, and not foget thy handmaid, and wilt give to thy servant a man-child: I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life." (1 Kings i. 11.) Then, with renewed hope and with gifts for the Temple more generous than ever before they repaired to-

gether on the festival day to Jerusalem * to make another effort to "take heaven by violence, for the violent carry it away." But here again, an all-wise God, who always puts to the test the virtues of his most faithful friends, permitted it so to happen that their faith and reliance in heaven were exposed to a severe trial. As the modest pair were timidly approaching the altar with their offerings, one of the chief priests met them, and eying them with anger and scorn, spoke to them publicly and in hearing of the assembled people, saying: "How dare you, useless creatures that you are, presume to make offerings to the Lord? Go away, lest by your offerings to the Most High you draw down upon your heads His just anger, for your oblation can never find favor in His eyes."

Cut to their very hearts, and blushing with shame and confusion, the afflicted couple hastily withdrew. Joachim wept with anguish, but in the midst of his tears he prayed in humility to the Lord. "O Lord, eternal God, under the influence of Thy Holy Spirit we were led to the Temple. Behold us disgraced at the very altar and turned rudely away. My many sins deserve this disgrace, therefore I accept it and submit to Thy will. But O God, despise not the creature of Thy almighty hand. If our sins hold back Thy mercy from us, oh, then remove from our hearts whatever may be displeasing to Thee! For Thou art powerful, O God of Israel, and what Thou willest, Thou doest, notwithstanding man's unwillingness. Let our prayers reach the foot of Thy throne. We are poor and miserable, but Thou are infinite, yet ever inclined to bow down Thy ear and hand in mercy to the lowly and desolate."

* This devout couple had in Jerusalem either as their own property, or at least rented, a small house where they used to dwell during their frequent and protracted pilgrimages to the Temple.

Joachim then repaired into a desert place; for, on the one hand he did not wish, after his late deep disgrace, to appear among his friends and neighbors; on the other hand he wished, by protracted prayer, watching, fasting, and weeping, to storm the goodness of God, and to beseech Him to convert their disgrace to His honor and glory. St. Anne performed the same devotions in her own house: augmenting her alms to the poor, and suffering in silent patience the contempt and mockery of her own maid-servant.

EASTER JOYS.

Joachim passed forty days in the desert. His grief was soon to be turned into joy. An angel of the Lord came to him and said: "Joachim, thou hast been a faithful and upright servant of God. The Most High from His throne in heaven has heard thy prayers and longings. He will grant to thee and thy devout companion more than you have asked for. For behold, Anne shall conceive and bring forth a daughter who shall be blessed among women, and she shall be called Mary. This shall be a sign to thee; namely, when thou goest to Jerusalem, thou wilt meet thy wife before the gate which is called Golden."

About the same time, an angel appeared to St. Anne and brought her the same joyful tidings. Without any knowledge of each other's movements, the holy couple rose up and repaired to the sanctuary of the Temple, in order to return thanks to God. As Joachim was about to pass through the Golden Gate that stands behind the Temple and opens towards the valley of Josaphat, he met St. Anne. After the mysterious vision of the angel, she in company with her maid had travelled up to Jerusalem, in order to testify her thankfulness for God's great mercies

to her. How unspeakable was the joy of St. Anne and St. Joachim when they thus met after an absence of many days filled with grief and sadness! Together they entered the Temple and offered up a lamb. As St. Anne had previously sympathized with the grief of Anna, the mother of Samuel, and, after her example, had uttered a similar vow, so now she might well, in the exultation of her heart, chant the hymn of praise, sung of yore by her ancestress when God was pleased to grant her prayer:

"My heart hath rejoiced in the Lord, and my horn is exalted in my God: my mouth is enlarged over my enemies: because I have joyed in thy salvation. There is none holy as the Lord is: for there is no other beside Thee, and there is none strong like our God. Do not multiply to speak lofty things, boasting: let old matters depart from your mouth: for the Lord is a God of all knowledge, and to Him are thoughts prepared. The bow of the mighty is overcome, and the weak are girt with strength. They that were full before have hired out themselves for bread: and the hungry are filled, so that the barren hath born many: and she that had many children is weakened. The Lord killeth and maketh alive, He bringeth down to hell and bringeth back again. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, He humbleth and He exalteth. He raiseth up the needy from the dust, and lifteth up the poor from the dunghill, that he may sit with princes, and hold the throne of glory. For the poles of the earth are the Lord's, and upon them He hath set the world. He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness, because no man shall prevail by his own strength. The adversaries of the Lord shall fear Him: and upon them shall He thunder in the heavens: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth, and He shall give empire to His king, and shall exalt the horn of His Christ." (1 Kings ii. 1–11.)

Christian reader, rejoice with this happy couple, congratulate them, and in your own severe trials and tribulations, implore these holy parents for assistance and protection. Moreover, dear reader, persevere in prayer, be constant in your confidence in God, and you will experience the goodness of God. Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

CHAPTER V.

MARY CONCEIVED WITHOUT SIN.

CHRISTIAN reader, with heartfelt joy, but also with reverent humility, pronounce the words "Immaculate Conception." With joy, because of the unparalleled distinction with which our beloved Mother was honored. With humble reverence, because we are incompetent to treat this sublime mystery, and because it reminds us of our own sinfulness. Mary, conceived without the stain of original sin, assist us to praise becomingly thy exalted dignity in this profound mystery of thy immaculate conception.

THE CHILD OF GRACE.

In the last chapter, Christian reader, you observed, not without deep sentiments of compassion, the severe trials that the saintly parents of the Blessed Virgin were compelled to undergo, on account of their childlessness. You admired their confidence in God and their courage and constancy in the hour of trial. You rejoiced when their prayers were at last heard, and their wishes gratified. All this must have served to awaken in your soul the conviction that the child born of these parents,

now so far advanced in years and until this late day so barren, could not be a mere child of nature. It must be a child of grace, a miraculous gift from God, though in a strict sense begotten of these parents and belonging to the race of Adam. "When St. Anne," says St. John Damascene, "conceived the Blessed Virgin, nature yielded her place to grace." Such was the earliest privilege and prerogative of Mary, to be conceived immaculate, to be spared all contact with everything begotten of sensuality and fleshly lust.

Happy, chaste, holy parents of the purest of virgins! you are now enjoying in everlasting glory the reward of your angelic lives. Obtain for all married couples the same spirit of resolute chastity. Alas, O Lord, how often a shameful lust of the senses poisons the early life of young persons in the very bud of manhood or womanhood! How often are the blessings and the grace of God shut out from the hearts of members of an otherwise happy family by an unworthy, degrading, beastly exercise of married life!

MARY'S BODY.

We must bear in mind that Mary's sublime conception was not solely in reference to her as being the child of saintly and chaste parents; but much more, in fact wholly, in reference to her high dignity as the long-predestined and future Mother of the most high God. The body of this lovely infant was predestined to a double honor: first to be the tabernacle of the purest soul ever created, and secondly, and chiefly, to be the temple of God. If the bodies of our first parents, Adam and Eve, came forth from the hands of their Creator perfect in their kind, how perfect, how pure, how free from every inclination to sin, must have been the body of the Mother

of God! At no distant day, the infinite majesty of God was to assume this blood and this flesh.

Hence the body of the Blessed Virgin was from the very moment of its conception a worthy object of the love and complacency of God. It was the crown of visible creation. Hence, too, should you, Christian reader, admire and reverence the body of the Mother of God, for it was the dwelling-place of a holy soul, and the ostensorium of Divinity. Forget not that your soul, too, though in a lower sense, is a temple of God. In words of warning and solicitude, St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians tells us: "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are. Know you not that your bodies are members of Christ, that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own. For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body." (iii. 16; vi. 19, 20.)

Therefore, Christian reader, conceive and cherish a sacred reverence for your own body. It is a miracle-work of creation. During your holy communion it becomes a very ostensorium of the Almighty God, who is the source and origin of all goodness. It has been purchased at a high price; no less than the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is, moreover, destined to dwell forever in happiness in the presence of its Maker. Learn, then, to always look upon your body, and the bodies of all your fellow-beings, as nothing less than living temples of God.

MARY'S SOUL.

Let us reverently glance at the soul of the Mother of God. The human soul is the most mysterious and un-

fathomable miracle-work of creation. It springs from heaven, and thither it is destined to return. It came forth from the mouth of the Most High, when He breathed it into the breast of the first man. It is an image and likeness of the Deity. It is the soul that places man at the head of God's creation, as its ruler. It is the soul that renders man capable of knowing his God, of loving Him and serving Him. All this may be said of any ordinary soul on account of its own nature, but of the soul of the most exalted of God's creatures, all this was true to an extraordinary degree. From its first spirit-act, its free will was in complete accord with the divine will. Its first and last spirit-act of the will was a pure and disinterested act of oblation, an act of the fullest surrender of self and of her will to the will of the heavenly Father, an unqualified *fiat*—"be it done." Mary, the second Eve, began then her earthly life with an act of obedience, while the first Eve plunged the whole human race into destruction by an act of disobedience. In regard to her knowledge we salute her as the Seat of Wisdom, as the wisest among the wise virgins, as the Mother of Good Counsel. Certainly so sinless a soul must have possessed the brightest and the most copious talents and ability.

If the soul of St. Anne's daughter, in its acts of willing and knowing, was like the clearest mirror, from whose bright surface the image of the Deity was powerfully reflected, her perceiving and passively affected soul was the dwelling-place of the most refined sentiments of interior love for God, and of the charitable love for her fellow-beings. In the very bud resided the germ of that heroism with which she held up against the thrusts of the seven-fold sword that afterwards pierced her heart, and that enabled her to stand bravely to the last moment beneath the cross of her dying Son.

Alas, how thoughtless, how sinful, we are to trifle with

the sacred feelings and affections of the soul. How subject we are to the influence of caprice and whim! how easily we permit ourselves to be turned away from our tendency to God by every shifting wind of sensuality! How we return to the right path and again abandon it! Yet we ought to know, and the experience of our past life should teach us, that our souls with all their longings and desires, with their affections and yearnings can never find peace or satisfaction till they repose in God Himself.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

Now, Christian reader, gather up all the powers of your understanding and will, in order to contemplate the origin and the completion of this mystery. This miracle-mystery, so peculiar in itself, so unparalleled in the decrees of Providence, wrought in Mary's person by the Almighty God, consists in this great truth: That she, in the first moment of her conception, by special grace and permission of Almighty God, by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, was preserved from every stain of original sin. This is not a mere pious opinion of over-zealous votaries of the Blessed Virgin; but it is, as you know and believe, the pronounced and expressed doctrine of faith held by the infallible Catholic Church, which Church we cannot refuse our unreserved submission.

Let us, now, in the first place, Christian reader, endeavor to learn something about the nature of original sin, as defined and set forth in the Council of Trent. Adam, the chief father of the whole human race, by his transgression of the divine command, injured not only himself, but also his whole posterity. He also lost, by his sin of disobedience, the sanctity and justice bestowed upon him by God, and lost them for us all. Tainted by his

sin of disobedience, he fastened upon all future sons of his family, not only death and bodily sufferings, but also sin, which is the death of the soul.

Thus, all of Adam's children carry on their brow the brand of sin and shame. Great and disastrous is the evil that this sin produces within us. It robs us of our higher and supernatural life, it enfeebles and wounds our very nature. Frequently the very symptoms of the original grandeur and beauty of this nature become barely perceptible, while the likeness of God, which once shone forth so brilliantly from it before the eyes of angels, has been completely hidden from view.

Now, from this original sin, and from all its deadly consequences, was the Blessed Virgin shielded and preserved from the moment of her immaculate conception. As our late Holy Father, Pope Pius IX., declared in his definition of this mystery: "It was becoming that the ever-blessed Virgin should be clothed in a garment of perfect sanctity, that she should be exempt from every stain of original sin, that she should win the most complete victory over the old serpent. For she was to be a Mother in every respect worthy of her divine Son. She was to be chosen by God to be the Mother of His only begotten Son, whom He loved as He loved Himself, and who according to His nature was to be, at one and the same time, the Son of God the Father and the Son of the Blessed Virgin. She was to be the Mother chosen by the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. She it was from whom the Holy Ghost, by divine acts of His will and operation, was to cause Him to be born, from whom He Himself proceeds. It was becoming that He who has in heaven a Father, whom the seraphim praise as the thrice-holy God, should have on earth a mother who was not for a moment deprived of grace, innocence, or glory."

Moreover, the teaching of the Church regarding this

mystery of the Immaculate Conception is not to be understood in the sense that Mary did not need the graces of the Atonement through Jesus Christ. It is clearly and expressly affirmed that she was exempted from sin and sanctified through the merits of Christ and by virtue of grace, of grace preventing original sin, as we through the same are cleansed after our birth in holy Baptism. But it would also be a heresy to maintain or believe that the sanctification accruing to the Blessed Virgin by virtue of her immaculate conception is the same as is operated in us by the waters of Baptism. True, by the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the guilt of original sin is remitted, and everything pertaining strictly to the true and exact nature of sin is blotted out. Yet the reliquiæ of sin, the germ of sin, the concupiscence of our lower nature, remain. This lingering concupiscence is the reason why we are so early surprised by its emotions, why we cannot through the long course of our lives save ourselves from any sin without the aid of a special grace. But Mary was preserved even from this concupiscence arising from original sin, so that she was sanctified not only in her soul, but also in her body. During her whole life upon earth she, by special aid of grace, kept herself, body and soul, intact from even the smallest sin against God. Therefore the grace of sanctification with which Mary was favored in her immaculate conception reached an immeasurably higher degree than our sanctification in Baptism.

Chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God, she was, even in the moment of her conception, so filled with the treasures of divine grace, that the Archangel Gabriel could with truth address her a title belonging only to herself, namely, that of "full of grace." For the same reason, too, did she excel by far all created beings, even the seraphim and cherubim. This grace was planted in

her inmost being, where it struck deep roots, and in her life put forth beauteous foliage and flowers and brought forth abundant fruit. This grace was like a fire which warmed into ardent piety her whole soul, her every thought, her will, her intellect. It was a light which cast its bright rays of heroism, beauty, and gentleness over her whole being. This fire and this light were now to burst forth upon the world, to enlighten and warm it.

Such is the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. Christian reader, if you meditate earnestly on this mystery, study it assiduously, you will comprehend and realize that the moment of such a conception must have been a moment of intense joy and unspeakable satisfaction both for heaven and for earth, as well as a moment of indescribable terror to the powers of hell.

CHAPTER VI.

JOY OCCASIONED BY THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

BY the first sin the tender relations existing between God and man were snapped asunder. Father and child were separated from each other in anger and sorrow. The glorious likeness of God imprinted on the soul of man was turned into a caricature, and became an object of horror and disgust in the eyes of the Creator. Mankind then strayed away from the paths of righteousness and violated God's laws.

At a very early period, even before the deluge, there came, so to speak, a complete break between God and man. "And God seeing that the wickedness of men was great on the earth, and that all the thought of their heart

was bent upon evil at all times, it repented Him that He had made man on the earth. And being touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, He said: I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, from man even to beast; . . . for it repenteth me that I have made them." (Gen. vi. 5–7.) Century after century sin succeeded sin, shame was heaped upon shame. With the honorable exception of a few chosen people, all men worshipped false gods. Heaven's gates were closed against all—that heaven which had been destined to receive into all its glory and happiness every child of earth. Of millions and millions of men who were born, who lived, and who died, not one attained to the possession of the one true God. Things were in this deplorable condition, when, as reckoned by learned and holy writers, in the memorable year of 732 after the foundation of pagan Rome, on the eighth of December, was a child conceived in the Land of Promise, in whose being reposed the fulness of the complacency and grace of God.

Here was a source of joy for the ever-adorable Trinity. But it was more. This sinless creature is destined to be the daughter of God the Father, the Mother of God the Son, and the spouse of the Holy Ghost. With the same complacent happiness that a father looks upon his daughter, a son upon his mother, a bridegroom upon his bride, did the Blessed Trinity look down on Mary, sinless and immaculate.

She was the dawn of a bright, fresh, happy day, after a long and dreary night. She was the inauguration of that reign of peace, of grace, and of justice, during which men would adore the one true God in spirit and truth; during which God, in His goodness, mercy, and wisdom, would be known, served, and loved, and during which it would be His delight to dwell among the children of men. (Prov. viii. 31.)

JOY IN HEAVEN.

The Immaculate Conception of Mary was a subject of extraordinary joy among the angels of heaven. It is a well-founded opinion, and one not without Scripture proof, that the most high God placed before the angels the image of His future Mother, in order to try their humility.

Here was shown to them the image of a sinless human being, of her who was to be their future queen. At this sight, the faithful angels were filled with holy joy, and seized with the utmost admiration. They were astonished at the boundless goodness of their almighty Creator, they glowed with sacred love for the virgin Mother of their God, and cheerfully recognized her as their lady and mistress. One of the most exalted spirits, however, a cherub who shone like the morning star, was offended at this wonderful elevation of human nature above the very angels themselves, and even communicated his proud, rebellious thoughts to other spirits, to whom he said in tones of anger: "I will ascend into [the highest] heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." (Is. xiv. 13, 14.) On account of their humble submission, the faithful angels became more beautiful, more spiritual, more like unto God. Lucifer and his unhappy followers, on the contrary, were transformed into demons, and hurled down from the heights of heaven to the depths of everlasting degradation and suffering. The inspired Seer of Patmos, the beloved disciple St. John the Evangelist, describes this event in the following words of the Apocalypse: "A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And there was seen another sign in heaven;

and behold a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns; and on his heads seven diadems. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered, that when she should be delivered, he might devour her Son. And there was a great battle in heaven; Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels. And they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying: Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you that dwell therein. And the dragon was angry against the woman: and went to make war with the rest of her seed" (Apoc. xii. *passim*).

Thus was the woman with twelve stars about her head and the moon under her feet, as she has from the earliest days of Christianity been represented in the Immaculate Conception, a source of joy for the good and of terror for the evil, even in her remote predestination. How much more heartfelt then was the shout of joy throughout the vaults of heaven and in the very souls of its happy inhabitants when this queen appeared in reality of existence! We can imagine the angels calling to each other: "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?" (Cant. vi. 9.)

For the rejected and condemned spirits, this same innocent child was terrible as an army set in array. Their widespread dominion, which, with falsehood and deceit, they had set up among men, was now about to crumble to ruins; for she had at last appeared who was to crush the serpent's head.

JOY ON EARTH.

But men on earth had still greater cause to rejoice at the conception of the Redeemer's Mother. For God so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten, His well beloved Son into the world (John iii. 16), and for Him prepared a worthy mother in the person of Mary, and for men a powerful intercessor and a sublime image and model. But alas! the world lay buried in darkness and ignorance. Men busied themselves about things of earth, and gave themselves up to pleasures, without taking time to think and remember that their almighty Father in heaven was watching over them, studying their welfare, and in His solicitude for the salvation of their immortal souls was perfecting the most astounding miracles. But two lowly hearts there were that were overflowing with holy joy—the hearts of Joachim and Anne, privileged parents of this grace-crowned child. Who can expres the joy that thrilled through the maternal heart of St Anne on ascertaining this wonderful conception? Who can tell her thoughts, or describe her humble sentiments of gratitude to God? But, although this heavenly jewel was concealed from the eyes of men and remained as yet unsuspected and unknown by the world, it was soon to appear in all its brilliancy to shed the light of joy and comfort over that world. This joy shall endure for all time. As often as the revolving year brings to us each succeeding eighth day of December, every Christian heart is lifted up in exaltation of joy and love at the remembrance of the immaculate conception of our Queen and Mother.

CHAPTER VII.

MARY'S BIRTH

THE DAWN.

DURING the months immediately preceding the birth of the Blessed Virgin, the happy mother, St. Anne, experienced a joy akin to the joys of heaven, and gathered grace from the heavenly fruit which she contained within her breast. Her whole soul was gently agitated by the mysterious operation of divine grace. From time to time, during fervent prayer, she was wrapt into ecstasy, in which she saw plainly the glory of the new Eve who was soon to appear on earth. From day to day her gratitude grew more heartfelt and her joy more intense, because, being enlightened by heavenly light, she learned from day to day to appreciate more fully the inestimable value, the unspeakable holiness, and the abundant graces of her privileged daughter. With a holy impatience she longed for the time when she would be permitted to gaze upon and to venerate that child, whose birth, whose name, and whose sublime destiny had been announced by an angel of God to herself and St. Joachim. Every day she offered this treasure of her heart to the Most High, and praised the condescension of that God who had at last heard the sighs and seen the tears of Israel; and who at last had permitted to appear that bright morning star of salvation, which was to herald the glorious rising of the Sun of eternal justice.

Holy, happy mother, St. Anne! pray before the throne of God that all Christian mothers may imitate

thy example during the anxious, trying months of their expectation. Permit them not to give themselves up, during that sacred period of their maternal life to the pleasures, vanities, or passions of the world. Direct their thoughts to their maternal dignity, to their motherly duties, and to their almighty Creator. Teach them that from the first moment of conception, they have to discharge high and holy duties towards the being sent by heaven to their keeping. Remind them that during these days, when they form, as it were, but one being and have but one and the same life with their precious treasure, every thought, noble or base, every sentiment, holy or wicked, every emotion, charitable or envious, that dwells in their hearts, exerts its influence for good or bad on the disposition of the child within their womb. Holy St. Anne, make clear to every Christian mother the infinite value of the immortal soul of her child, a soul that from the earliest moment of its existence becomes a special object of God's fatherly care and love! Teach and guide and guard all Christian mothers. Animate them daily and hourly with pious sentiments, and with an ardent desire to see and have their offspring baptized. Keep away from them, holy mother Anne, all undue and excessive anxiety about the future, all fears of the coming pains of child-birth. Give them hope and courage. Obtain for them confidence and reliance on the unfailing assistance of God, and on the help and intercession of thyself and of thy immaculate daughter.

SUNRISE.

The day foreshadowed from all eternity, the birth of the Mother of the world's Redeemer, had at last dawned. An air of solemnity prevailed through the home of St. Joachim and pervaded the breasts of all the inmates.

The few women who composed the circle of their friends and acquaintances were notified of the approaching hour, and came to render assistance and offer congratulations to the happy mother.

It was the eighth day of the Harvest Month, in the year of the world 5184, and 733 years after the founding of Rome.

It was the anniversary day of the dedication of Solomon's temple. This last coincidence was not without its mysterious meaning, for now the pure and living temple of the Blessed Trinity was to rise in beauty of form and proportion before the admiring gaze of happy men.*

The cradle of the Queen of angels was not inlaid with silver and gold, nor upholstered with precious hangings from Egypt, nor did it radiate perfume of aloe and myrrh as did the cradle of many another Hebrew babe. It was constructed of flexible wickers plaited together. Coarse bands of plain swaddling-clothes enveloped the tender arms that were to carry the world's Redeemer. Who can tell us of the many favors bestowed by God on this happy occasion? Who can describe the many signs of heaven's pleasure?—whether the room of the saintly mother, St. Anne, was illuminated by a miraculous shining light in that hour of grace, or whether angels from heaven, in celestial strains, yet inaudible and unintelligible to human ears, sang of the beauty and dignity of their new-born Queen?

It is certain, however, that the effulgence of heaven's

* "From a statement found in the writings of St. John Damascene, and from the generally accepted tradition prevailing to this day in Palestine, many writers aver that Mary was born, not in Nazareth, but in a house belonging to St. Joachim in the city of Jerusalem. In the latter place, a sumptuous church was built in very early times to the honor of St. Anne." (D. Wolff, "Jerusalem," 1872.)

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benedictions, a consciousness of the blessing of God penetrated the darkness of that memorable night and lit up the privileged room where Mary was born. We may well believe that angels in holy joy and happy eagerness, invisible though they were, hastened to salute this blessed infant and to offer her their protection.

GREETINGS.

Come, Christian reader, hasten to salute the newly born Mother of God. In childlike accents and with childlike simplicity say to this babe that is destined to be your Queen and Advocate: Hail, beauteous child of love and grace! In all humility of heart, I bow down before thee and offer thee, as best I can, the honor to which thou art entitled. All hail, daughter of God the Father; all hail, Mother of God the Son; all hail, spouse of the Holy Ghost! From the depths of my soul, I bid thee welcome. In the name of all my fellow-creatures, I salute and honor thee. Blessed be thy coming into the world! Blessed, thrice blessed, be our good and merciful God, who has sent thee upon earth to be the comfort and help of sinners! I believe firmly, royal child, that thou wilt give birth to the Saviour of men, and wilt crush the serpent's head. Oh, that I knew how to honor thee worthily, and to offer to thee the deep devotion of my heart! Obtain for me pardon for my sins. Let the sweet fragrance of thy countless virtues neutralize the offensive odor of my misdeeds. Child of benediction, thou who by thy birth hast prepared the world for dawning happiness, awake within me a true love and devotion to thy Son. Obtain for me the grace to be born over again, and thus be enabled to serve with renewed and increased zeal thy adorable Creator and my own.

Parents have cause and a right to rejoice when heaven

sends them their first offspring; especially if it is a child of prayer and of pious and ardent longing. The mother especially forgets her previous pains and anxiety, for this child is her own property, her first and most precious treasure. And if with maternal dignity the mother combines maternal piety, she beholds in this sweet little creature a beloved gift from the hands of the Creator, an immortal good entrusted to her by heaven, a child of God, at once capable and destined to know Him, love Him, and one day to possess Him, and enjoy His divine presence face to face.

How entranced with delight, then, must such a mother as St. Anne have been when she found herself mother of such a child as Mary! The child that our beloved saint held in her arms had before her a glorious future. The mother's heart knew this instinctively. Like every other mother's heart, St. Anne's loved to foresee and to dwell upon the future happiness in store for her infant offspring. She believed that the child would grow up in piety and goodness and beauty of person, and be the hope of earth and the delight of heaven. But what human being, what earthly mother ever lived, whose joy was not clouded, not alloyed with fear and trepidation for the future? St. Anne, severely tried as she had been, foresaw, amid the bright sunshine of Mary's life, the spectre of a dreadful sword dangling in the air and pointing mysteriously towards the Virgin's heart. St. Anne, with a mother's unfailing instinct, felt by anticipation the anguish and desolation that would one day weigh down and well-nigh crush this child, beloved by God.

O mother rich in graces, holy St. Anne! I salute and congratulate thee upon thy maternal dignity, upon thy happy and significant delivery. Be thou honored among mothers, for blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Mary.

That thou be honored and imitated by all our Christian

mothers, is the fondest wish of my heart. Beloved and venerable matron, St. Anne, share with me thy superabundant graces. May they flow from heaven upon me, and, like the morning dew upon the plant and fruit, may they foster in my heart the fragrance of a true and undying love for God my Father.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHRISTIAN MOTHER AT MARY'S CRADLE.

WOULD that I were permitted to summon all our Christian mothers around the cradle of the most beloved and most beautiful infant daughter of the human family!

MOTHER.

Next to the name of God, the sacred word mother is, in every language of man, the sweetest word of all. It is that consecrated word which our heart pulsates, before our lips can articulate a sound. Its memory follows us through all the storms of life's long journey, and lingers in our hearts like a gleam of sunshine that no cloud can obscure. Nowhere else on earth does human love manifest itself to such advantage, as in the character of a Christian mother. Its most fascinating smile beams from a mother's countenance. Its richest treasures are deposited in a mother's heart. When we reposed beneath this heart, even before our birth, its tender throb communicated to us the first impulse of our fœtal life. When she took us, for the first time, in her fond arms, and with enchanted eye gazed upon us, and

saw in us the image of herself, she felt and understood the powerful, secret bond that chained her to her offspring. She understood that this precious, tender being resting on her arms could live only by virtue of her love, and grow and thrive only by virtue of her future self-sacrifice. From the impulses of her own heart, from the innocent helplessness of her child, and from the mystic union existing between herself and it, she learned that for the rest of her days a sacred disinterested love was to be the law of her life. The duty and right of watching over the spiritual and temporal welfare of her offspring was to be for her at once an unfailing fountain of happiness, and yet an inexhaustible source of suffering and anxiety.

To the mother has been entrusted by heaven the sacred and arduous duty of a visible angel watching at the cradle of her child. To no higher purpose can she devote her hours of waking and sleeping.

Christian mother, your duties are arduous. Flowers bloom only at the expense of the gardener's care, they thrive by the sweat of his brow. So, too, does your child grow and thrive only at the cost of your time, labor, and, perhaps, tears. Happy the mother who has suffered, and suffered keenly, for the sake of her offspring. Happy the mother who has shed tears, whether of joy or sorrow, over her children. Prayerful tears it is that moisten and fertilize the young heart, as the dews from heaven bring forth, freshen, and beautify the flowers.

Suffering and sacrifice win for every mother an exalted position in the family, a sublime place in the estimation of all good men. According to our views, disinterested self-sacrifice takes the most exalted position: it stands higher than power or dignity, wealth or influence. This most exalted degree of self-sacrifice is reached and possessed by every mother who prays and watches and cares

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by the cradle of her child, at a time when that child is unconscious of a mother's care, a mother's love, a mother's pains, and can hardly recognize its mother's presence save by a half-conscious smile of innocence.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

It falls generally to the mother's lot to train the child. This certainly is not the least important among her other heavy obligations. Not every mother has so amiable a child to bring up as had St. Anne—a child conceived without original sin. On the contrary, the training of all children is much impeded and often spoiled from the fact that in the little darling the consequences of original sin soon manifest themselves to an alarming degree, and often with a semblance of loveliness. Beware, Christian mother, lest you permit the evil inclinations, so secretly lurking in your child's disposition, to grow strong and stubborn. If you do, that which should be a garden of fair flowers will become a field of stubble, overgrown with thorns and thistles. Alas for that mother, whose tender love goes to such an undue degree as to fear the tears forced from her child when punished for untoward whims! Alas for that mother, who, by over-indulgence and foolish admiration for her child, soon leads this little tyrant to hold the same opinion of itself, and to believe itself to be a wonder! A child must not be made a plaything of. It has rights and duties. But it must first of all, and above all, know its duties, before it hears mention made of its rights. In earliest childhood must the boy or the girl learn to control the will and submit to older persons. When the child is wayward, when stubborn and bent upon following its own inclinations, if it be then flattered and petted and coaxed, that child will soon become a little despot in its mother's home, and later prove a tyrant to

trample on the tenderest feelings of both father and mother. Holy Scripture teaches that the whelp becomes a lion and learns to devour men. (Ezech. ix. 3.)

TRUE MATERNAL LOVE.

In order that mothers may be enabled to discharge with tact, perseverance, and happy effect their sublime and disinterested duties, God, the great Parent of all, has endowed them with a twofold and very efficient quality; namely, maternal love mingled with piety. The mother loves her offspring with such an intense love, that in comparison with it the child's love entirely disappears. Deep and earnest as is a father's love, it is lukewarm and fleeting in comparison with a mother's love. When his child dies, the father sheds silent bitter tears, but time dries them up and heals the deep wound in his heart. But the child's death leaves in the mother's heart a wound that never heals. In her lonely hours, she stands in spirit by the grave of her little one, and sheds tears, years afterwards, fresh and bitter as on the burial day.

Without parallel in creation is the force of mother's love. It knows no reflection, will listen to no reason. It transforms pain into a pleasure. It turns grief into joy and works miracles, unconsciously. It never weakens nor turns away. Time cannot extinguish it, age cannot cool it.

True, there are many mothers who in the fulness of their natural love resemble the holy mother St. Anne. Would that they resembled her also in her supernatural love for God, in piety. As the germ of love has been planted, by the creating hand of God more deeply in the heart of woman than in the heart of man, so too is piety more deeply seated in woman's soul. When woman assumes the burden and dignity of motherhood, this feminine piety receives a new sacredness, a new lustre, a new sub-

ject, a new fire. We can conceive and picture to ourselves. unpleasant though it be, an excessively worldly woman, an indolent, silly, selfish, conceited, and even sensual, woman, But a worldly mother, an indolent, silly, conceited, selfish, and proud mother,—such a thing would be a monstrosity. Unless a mother sanctifies her love by that eternal love whereby the world was redeemed, she will simply be reproduced in her child who will reflect herself, and in loving that child, the mother will love only herself, her picture and substance; she will look upon her maternal duties as a burden, and find them irksome and exhausting. She will not understand how to be happy in the midst of her children, nor how to render them happy. A mother who yearns for the triumphs of vanity is incapable of sharing the joys of her little ones, or to prepare amusements for them. In her wandering imagination, her mind and heart will be constantly roaming beyond the tedious precincts of her domestic sphere. What value in the eyes of a woman have the noble impulses of motherhood, or the fond playfulness of children, if that woman is constantly seeking pleasure outside of her own house, looking for triumphs and conquests of wit and beauty in the whirl of so-called fashionable society? Such a woman, and only such a one, is capable of neglecting her children and forgetting them, just as she forgets and neglects her own maternal duty and dignity. Like a heartless stepmother, such a woman would entrust the jewel placed in her keeping by God to the careless, sordid hands of a hired nurse, in order that she herself may thus be enabled to hasten to scenes of frivolity and dissipation, there to cast down her crown of maternal laurels at the feet of a giddy, laughing world.

PART II.

MARY IS MADE WORTHY TO BECOME THE MOTHER OF GOD.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN RECEIVES THE NAME OF MARY.

MARY.

NAME replete with joy, full of grace, teeming with love, redolent of sacrifice! Thanks to Thee, O God eternal, for having chosen for and given to Thy Mother and our advocate a name so fraught with unfailing consolation for us. It is a great glory, and one peculiar to the Redeemer of the world, that the Father gave Him a name which is above all other names; for at the name of Jesus every knee shall bend in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. (Phil. ii. 9.)

Now as the ever-blessed Mother of God is, after God Himself, the most perfect and purest being and most deserving of respect, so the holiest and loveliest and most powerful name, after the name of Jesus, is eminently due and becoming to her. As not only the holy name of Jesus was brought from heaven by the archangel Gabriel, but also the name of Jesus' precursor, John, so is it highly probable that to the favored daughter of St. Anne was sent, by God's command and through the angel's ministry, the beloved name of Mary.

Eight days after the birth of the Blessed Virgin there was a religious and social festival in the home of Joachim and Anne. It was customary among the Jews to give a name to the newly born infant on the eighth day after its birth. This event was attended with many ceremonies and accompanied by many prayers. On the present occasion, the assembled friends and relatives may have suggested to Mary's parents several names for the child, chosen from the names of their numerous and respected ancestry. Such was done at the naming of St. John the Baptist. But now the parents, Joachim and Anne, as did then Elizabeth and Zachary, cut short all these friendly suggestions by declaring jointly, "Mary is her name."

MEANING OF THE NAME.

What meaning in the name of Mary! It must be of deep significance, it must be holy and lovely, given as it was by the Most High Himself to the grace-abounding, immaculate Mother of God and Queen of heaven and earth. Sacred writers discover five profound meanings in this holy name of Mary.

In the first place, St. John Damascene tells us it means *woman*. Mary was in the highest, deepest, fullest, and most exalted sense a *woman*. She was *maid* and *matron* at one and the same time. In her were conspicuous, to the most sublime degree, all the virtues, all the influence of *woman*. Hence every true Christian from time immemorial greets her in the beautiful prayer, "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, O ever-glorious and blessed Virgin!" She has ever been styled Virgin, Maid of Nazareth, our Lady, our Intercessor and Mediatrix. Indeed, there can hardly be found a more available term to express what Mary is to us, than the simple title, "Our blessed Lady."

In the second place, the name of Mary signifies *mistress*, *lady*, and *ruler* or *queen*. From the first moment of her existence, Mary was a mistress, a queen, and a ruler over Satan, whose head she crushed. She was a mistress over sin; for never could it enter with its allurements and its curse into her sin-proof soul. Moreover, what a dominion as mistress Mary exercised, when she commanded the Son of God Himself. The holy Gospel relates the whole history of Jesus' youthful life, from the age of twelve till the time of His going out on His mission, in the few brief words, "He was subject to them." Can there be a greater or a more gracious and graceful dominion of mistress than that exercised by her over the infinite Master of heaven and earth? Mary is also mistress and queen of angels and of men. She is the Queen of angels, the Mother, the refuge, the grace-dispenser of men. Her name, her words, her history, her pains and sorrows, all that recalls Mary to our memories, exercises a mysterious and powerful influence all over the earth and for all time. Where Jesus Christ reigns and is beloved, there Mary reigns, there too she is beloved. In the third place, Mary means *Star of the Sea*. St. Bonaventure teaches that she is a Star, by reason of her rare purity, which was only increased by the birth of the Divine Word, who, like a ray of light from a star, was radiated from her person, without depriving her of the light of purity, or even lessening it. She is a star because of her rare beauty and the incomparable courage obtained through her light by all who apply to her when tossed about in danger on the stormy sea of this life. (*Specul.* c. 3.)

Here, Christian reader, let us together meditate anew on those well-known words of St. Bernard concerning the name of Mary, and which have so often and so powerfully moved your heart as well as mine: "O sinner, when the floods and tempests of this earthly life overwhelm thee,

so that thou canst not firmly set thy foot, turn not away thy gaze from the light of this guiding star. When the storms of temptation assail thee, and the rocks and quicksands of vexation and trial threaten to shatter thy bark of hope, look up to that bright star in the heavens and call on the name of Mary. When the turgid billows of pride and of ambition, when the floods of calumny, are about to submerge thee, look up to this star and call the name of Mary. When anger, avarice, concupiscence convulse the peace of thy soul, look up to this star and call on Mary. When thy sins rise up like hideous monsters before thy troubled vision, when thy conscience stings thee, when the terrors of future judgment fill thee with deadly anguish, when gloom and sadness overpower thee, when thou findest thyself on the brink of hellish despair, take courage, think on Mary, and thou wilt find from thy own inward experience how true are the sayings of those who tell thee that the name of the Blessed Virgin is 'Star of the Sea,' the name of the Virgin is Mary." (Luke i. 27; S. Bern. Serm. 2, *sup. Missus est.*, etc.)

In the fourth place, the name of Mary signifies, besides Star of the Sea, "*ocean of bitterness.*"

It means sea or ocean, by reason of those floods of grace which a bountiful God has sent upon the Virgin "full of grace." It means ocean of bitterness because she is the sorrowing Mother full of bitter affliction. With even more truth than could even the pious mother-in-law of Ruth, may Mary say, "Call me not Noemi (that is, beautiful), but call me Mara (that is, bitter), for the Almighty hath quite filled me with bitterness" (Ruth i. 20). It means also sea of bitterness, for she prepared a flood of destruction for the evil spirits, as the Egyptians of old were overtaken and destroyed by the floods of the Red Sea, when in pursuit of God's Chosen People. With appropriate significance does the Venerable Albertus

Magnus write, when he tells us: "When you feel yourselves so far led away by the allurements of sin as to be on the point of yielding to passion, launch yourself without delay into this ocean of bitterness, pronounce this sacred name, and you will most certainly discover, from your immediate experience, that she does not bear the name of Mary in vain." (*Comment. on Luke*, c. i.)

In the fifth place, the name of Mary signifies, with much exactness, *the illuminated* and *the illuminator*. Mary illuminates the whole world by her sublime example, by the miracles of her mercy, and by the brightness of her glory. As in the olden time the children of Israel, when flying from Egyptian bondage, were guided and accompanied by a miraculous guide, which assumed by day the form of a cloud, in order to shelter them from the scorching heat of the sun, and by night the form of a pillar of fire, in order to light up their path through the wilderness, so is Mary a miraculous pillar that screens us from the heat of divine wrath, and at the same time enlightens and guides our uncertain footsteps through the bewildering mazes of the way to eternal salvation. What could we do in this vast wilderness of the world, miserable creatures that we are, and buried in darkness of sin, if we had not this brilliant light, this guiding pillar of mingled cloud and brightness? Take our sun away, and what will become of the world? Take Mary away from our ascetic life, and what will remain but an impenetrable darkness, a shadow of death, a gloom concealing all hope and comfort?

HOLINESS OF THE NAME OF MARY.

Christian reader, is not your heart filled with reverential awe, and yet with deep-seated confidence and hope, when you contemplate closely these meanings of

the holy name of Mary? Yes, her very name serves to remind you at once of her power and of her gentleness. It is, indeed, next to the holy and adorable name of Jesus, her Son, the most efficient. Our blessed Lord once uttered the assuring promise: "Amen, amen, I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in My name He will give it you." (John xvi. 23.) May we not fondly and piously hope that, as Jesus loved His Mother so tenderly, He would have said also to the poor suppliants of earth: "Verily, verily, I say to you, whatsoever you ask Me for in My Mother's name, that will I give you." Indeed, the renowned archbishop, St. Anselm, asserts and maintains something apparently incredible when he states: "Salvation and security will often come to us quicker when we call on the name of Mary, than when we repeat the name of her only begotten Child, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Not, of course, that the mother is greater or mightier than her Son, nor because He is great and mighty through her (for He is not, of course), but because she is great and mighty through Him. On the contrary, the Son is rather the Lord and Master of all, who distinguishes and discriminates between the merits of the individual suppliants. When, therefore, He does not grant a petitioner at once, when calling on His name, He refuses to hearken for a wise purpose. But if the salvation-seeker call upon the name of His Mother, then the merits and power of the mother mediate and succeed in securing a hearing, even when the petitioner's own merits would not by any means warrant nor merit such a successful hearing." (*Lib. de B. Virg.* c. vi.)

THE CHRISTENING NAME OF THE CHRISTIAN.

As in the case of the infant daughter of St. Anne, who received her name soon after birth, so to every child

born of Christian parents a name is solemnly given during the administration of Baptism, soon after the child's entrance into the world. A profound meaning lies hidden in this usage of the Church. The child is thus and then provided by heaven with a patron saint, who is to be its model and protector for life. As patron, this saint is to encourage, warn, and guide upon the road of salvation, the growing and grown-up Christian. As protector, the saint, by virtue of his merits and his intercession before the throne of God, is to sustain his foster-child and ward, to strengthen him and to keep him from sin; or, if he fall into sin, to bring him back to sorrow and repentance.

Christian reader, resolve to venerate and to love with a child's sincerity the name of your holy patron saint. Resolve to observe in a Christian way every year your patron saint's name's day, by hearing Mass in his honor and, if possible, receiving the sacraments. Or if this is not possible for you to do, keep up the day on the following Sunday or on the next feast day of the Church. Walk in a path worthy of your holy patron. It is related that the famous Alexander the Great had in his army a soldier whose name was also Alexander, but still a very coward before an enemy. One day the king said to him, "Either walk and live in a manner worthy of an Alexander, or else lay aside the name." Beware lest you should leave it in the power of your patron saint in heaven to make to yourself a similar rebuke: "Either live worthy of my name or lay it aside."

Devout Christian reader, should it be your happy privilege to have received in holy Baptism or afterwards in Confirmation, from your pious parents and godfather and godmother, the delightful name of Mary, I congratulate you. I congratulate you on your happiness in having for your patroness this powerful protector, advocate, and model. It is a sign of unspeakable predilection to have

the Blessed Virgin for one's name patroness, if the one who bears the name only tries to become worthy of it and of her. But so much the more are you bound to sanctify at least some of the annual festivals of the Blessed Virgin by devout visits to the church, by receiving the holy sacraments, and by other works of piety. If you do this, you may hope to enjoy her assistance during life and in the hour of your death. For it is believed among all men, that it was never heard of for one who sought refuge under her protecting arm to be abandoned and lost. How much, therefore, will those who are specially dedicated to her service and who bear her name experience the powerful assistance of this mighty yet gentle and compassionate patroness!

CHAPTER X.

THE HOME EDUCATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

NEW LIFE.

FROM the moment that Mary, the lovely and holy guest from heaven, entered the quiet home of Joachim and Anne, it assumed even more plainly than before the character of a temple of God. An atmosphere of peace, love, and devotion pervaded its every part. In no other atmosphere could this tender plant, fresh from the garden of God, thrive and bloom. It now became the pleasing yet arduous duty of the saintly parents to teach and train their child. Where can we find words sufficient to describe the solicitude, fondness, and reverence with which they entered upon their new duties? St. Anne

never grew tired looking upon the angelic countenance of her child. When she would caress her babe, or even look upon her, her motherly heart overflowed with a heavenlike sweetness. To mention even the name of Mary was a new joy to St. Anne's soul. Often when she would press her little daughter to her breast, and would think of the future awaiting her, with its wealth of blessings and its store of sorrow, the fond mother would shed tears of mingled joy and grief that would flow down copiously on the head of the child. When Mary slept, the devoted mother would kneel by her bedside, gaze with wonder upon her face, and then, clasping her own hands in prayer, would bury herself in deep meditation on the wonderful mercies of God.

MARY GROWS IN YEARS AND IN GRACE.

The infant virgin, obeying the universal law of our nature, advanced in strength and size of body. To the delighted parents this gradual, steady growth was of course a source of pride and satisfaction. To the very angels, too, it must have been a joyous spectacle to see their future Queen essaying, at the guiding hand of her mother, to accomplish that indispensable early feat of man, namely, to walk. What a pleasure to see the timid child venture to make, alone and with trembling limbs her first few steps, and then fall into the ever-ready outstretched arms of the delighted mother! What a comfort when the little one prattled for the first time into the eager ears of her mother, who alone could understand it, the sweet name of "mother," and soon after the sacred name of "father"! Such moments are regal festivals in every truly God-fearing yet God-loving family.

At an unusually early age appeared the light of God's grace and wisdom, for by virtue of her immaculate conception these qualities abounded in the soul of the future

Mother of God. The saintly parents were astonished when they discovered these qualities manifesting themselves. They were delighted to see how soon she had learned to fold her hands and, with angelic beauty and simplicity, pray with childish, yet serious and intelligent devotion. A charming gentleness, a holy earnestness, an amiable docility, were gradually, steadily, and rapidly developed in her character. Though she was childlike, she was not childish. At an age when other children are hardly conscious of their existence, Mary began to hold sweet converse in fervent prayer with her Father in heaven. All the emotions of her soul were guided by the Holy Ghost. Most attentive was her willing ear to the voice of the Holy Spirit. A childlike love for God adorned her simplest play and her earliest duties.

With regard to the heavenly Father and her fellow-beings, Mary enjoyed the most happy relations. Nor were her relations to God's inanimate creation less pleasant. By the commission of original sin, man had brought enmity between himself and many of the animals of creation and had frightened from his presence the gentler creatures. But as Mary was free from this sin, there were renewed around her some of the most touching scenes of Eden's garden. She entertained a deep-seated love and a perfect appreciation of the wonders and mysteries of nature. The wild beasts of the forest and the timid birds of the air displayed in her presence, as she would pass through the fields, a most unusual confidence and trust. In the midst of these miracles of beauty and power of nature, the tender child of God would adore the God who made all these wondrous works of nature.

YOUTH.

Christian reader, when you thus look back in spirit on the lovely, sunny, angelic youth-time of the Blessed Vir-

gin, what sentiments are awakened in your soul, what visions rise before your mental view! As the soft tones of a vesper-bell reminds the lonely traveller in a foreign land of his distant home and of his dear ones far away awakening in his breast a longing for his own fireside, so should you feel and think, and, with sorrowful longing eye, look back to the distant yet fair scenes of your youth. Days of happy harmless joys! Days of innocence and childish fear of God, whither have ye flown? As the rushing hurricane or the destructive hail-storm beats down the fair and promising field of wheat, so perhaps, alas! have the pestilent winds of concupiscence and the violent tempest of evil passions passed, like destroying angels, over the sinless paradise of your childhood. Your mother, who in those days guided and loved you, has perhaps since then shed many bitter tears over you. Or, may be, you have passed many a sorrowful hour in remorse over her grass-grown grave. Now, that time of youth has passed away forever—forever in this life. Neither wishing nor sighing nor longing can bring one minute of it back. And if, perhaps, you at that time dwelt in the sunshine of blessing and happiness, and enjoyed childhood's pure pleasures to their full, and yet, child that you were, did not advert to these favors, nor thank God for them, now at least thank your heavenly Father and renew sentiments of filial affection and gratitude towards your worthy and fond and devoted parents, whether they linger still in feeble age in the old homestead, or have been laid for long years in the grave,—thank them with a generous heart for your countless blessings of soul and body enjoyed in early years.

But, dear Christian, if you compare the years of your youth with the angelic youth of the ever-blessed Virgin, will not other feelings of a far different nature be stirred up in your breast? Was the happy time of your youth

entirely cloudless? Was not its sunshine sometimes overcast? Was not its brightness now and then tarnished with unsightly blemishes which you would now gladly shut out from your view, and which you should endeavor to remove by copious tears of repentance? Alas, at what an early day appear those childish waywardnesses which are the prolific seed of future guilty transgressions! Those virtues of childhood, such as piety, sincerity, obedience, truthfulness, and purity, they are too soon subjected to severe tests and perhaps suffer shipwreck in the struggle. When does it happen in our day of premature precociousness that children bring to their first confession an untarnished and whole garment of innocence?

Most pure Virgin Mary, when I contrast the years of my childhood with thine, my soul is overwhelmed with remorse and confusion. Deign then to screen from the eyes of an offended God, with thy mantle of innocence, all the sins of my early life, those I forget as well as those that I remember. To the heavenly Father I offer up all the chaste thoughts, the edifying words, the meritorious works and practices of virtue that distinguished thee in childhood, as an atonement to Him for my evil thoughts, words, and acts which I had the misfortune to be guilty of in my childhood.

Holy parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne, I implore ye, by the manifold joys which you experienced in the virtuous childhood of your angelic daughter, as well as by the manifold cares and services which you delighted to exercise in her regard, to beg of God that He would forgive me the great crime of having lost by sin the precious time of my childhood.

PARENTAL TRAINING.

For you, Christian parents, in the sacred and imperative duty of training your children during the first years

of their existence, the God-fearing parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne, are a glorious model and standard. What a miserably disastrous opinion is that prevailing one which holds or pretends to hold that the spiritual or religious training of a child should begin only with the dawning of the so-called age of reason in the child! Long previous, before the germ of evil begins to unfold itself in the soil of this child-garden, in the soul of the child, the good seed of virtue must be sown in the susceptible dispositions, in the hungry soil, that it may there put forth and fix its roots, and when the age of reason comes, be already strong and vigorous enough to outgrow and smother every weed.

There are, Christian parents, four special virtues which you must endeavor to instil at a very early age into the minds of the children whom heaven has sent to you for safe keeping. These virtues are piety, obedience, truthfulness, and modesty.

(*a*) Piety. — Children are naturally pious. Hence, Christian mother, it behooves you to awaken in earliest years this fortunate disposition of your child, and to nourish this natural impulse with suitable supernatural truth and facts. You must needs represent to the child that everything surrounding it—food, clothing, home, kind parents and friends, and other blessings of life, are all gifts from a kind Providence, to whom in return he should show a grateful heart, a willing obedience, and other commendable virtues pleasing to God.

What an inexhaustible wealth of most interesting and instructive truth and example is to be found in the single subject of the birth of Our Lord on Christmas!—for instance, the beautiful Babe itself in the crib, the lowly stable, the joyous angels, the wondering shepherds, the bright star in the East and the wise men journeying to Bethlehem. In the story of Christmas, the childish imag-

ination, diverted, pleased, and instructed, is directed to a pleasant yet profitable consideration of the great mystery of man's redemption. Its intellect and tender heart are warmed with a knowledge and appreciation of a sublime subject. Moreover, Christian mother, until such time as your child is able to join you in prayer, you must present to its notice some religious practices, and also take care that all other persons surrounding the child should do the same in its presence. Thus the child, on acquiring further knowledge, will know of nothing else, and will not be able to understand how one can sit to table, leave his bed in the morning, or retire to rest at night without saying his prayers. As soon as the child can pronounce a few consecutive words, the maternal teacher must teach it its *Pater Noster* or "Our Father." As the first bright moments of a new day are to be devoted to prayer, so should the earliest hours of innocent childhood be dedicated to the service of God.

(*b*) Obedience.—"For as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners: so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just," says the holy apostle St. Paul. (Rom. v. 19.)

Thus as the sin of disobedience proved to be for all mankind an inexhaustible source of sin and misery, so obedience became the beginning of man's regained innocence and restored happiness. So too the individual man or woman, who by personal disobedience has become estranged from God, is to be brought back to His friendship by the practice of the contrary virtue obedience. A vigorous disciplining in the virtue of obedience is therefore for your child, Christian parent, the greatest benefit, for it is a victory over inordinate lusts of sensuality and stubborn selfishness. Sometimes even in very small children an unseemly and wilful stubbornness shows itself in an extraordinary degree, and they soon learn how to

obtain the object of their whimsical desires by petulant crying and other evil and annoying methods.

Now, then, Christian mother, how do you conduct yourself when in the midst of such a scene gotten up by your darling child? Will you give in? Will you coax and wheedle? Will you permit your child to lay down conditions for you? No; you must punish, and punish quickly, so that this scene may vanish as soon as possible and not return again in a hurry. This constant, inexorable, and just motherly chastisement will soon have such effect upon your child, that it will continue to submit and obey without any attempt at contradiction, or disposition to question authority.

(*c*) Truthfulness.—It was by the stratagem of lying that the tempter brought about the fall of our first parents. In the youthful soul of every child of Adam a trace of this vice is to be discovered. Hence parents, in training their little ones, should watch this tendency to falsify. An untruth must be severely reprimanded, and if repeated and persisted in, the child ought to be punished. If the first yielding on the part of a child to the temptation to lie is an effort to thus escape a merited chastisement, the prudent parent should chastise doubly this fault for which the lie is told. On the contrary, he should reprimand mildly and firmly the fault which the child will acknowledge at once, with the assurance that it is for telling the truth he is indebted for his escape from punishment. But how often a misunderstanding on the part of the parent is itself the cause of untruthfulness in the child! When a child, through levity and thoughtlessness, accidentally breaks a pane of glass or a plate, or when playing soils his clothes, he very often must expect from impatient parents a punishment out of all proportion with the act of carelessness. There is no guilt, and the child by anticipating the coming punishment often atones be-

forehand very fully for his fault, if fault there is, by his dread of his parents' anger. Hence he looks upon the coming punishment as a sort of injustice done to him, and to avoid it will have recourse to whatever means offers itself first to his mind. But if the child is not punished for actual sin, such as disobedience, sulkiness, and lying, then the parents show that they know how to destroy their child.

(*d*) Modesty.—Man, the image and likeness of God and destined to a high and holy end, has an exalted dignity. Sentiments of honor and of modesty are the true inwardness of this inborn nobility and dignity. There should be a natural aversion to everything immodest and offensive to this nobility. Hence, Christian parents, treat your child not only with love but with reverence, even in that age when of himself he can have no idea of his own high destiny and dignity. Deal with him as if he had a full and correct notion of what is wrong.

Your feelings of tenderness, Christian mother, must not permit you to allow in the clothing, position, or occupation of your child anything that later on in his life would prove disastrous.

Say not that the young ones are innocent and harmless. They are often not as innocent as they seem. But if they are innocent, then take care to keep them so.

Above all things, Christian parents, you are bound to give example of strict modesty to your growing child. When in his presence avoid everything that would be unbecoming for him to see or hear, or that might be suggestive to him of improper thoughts. God grant that the terrible words of Him who was the children's Friend may not alight as a curse and sentence of condemnation on the head of any father or mother: "Wo to him through whom scandals come, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea,

than that he should scandalize one of these little ones." (Luke xvii. 1, 2.)

Christian parents, beg often and often of the pious parents of the Blessed Virgin, that they would impart to you the Christian, the heavenly faculty of bringing up your children for God and His holy cause, and the art of winning their tender souls to virtue, more through your own good example, than by coarse reproaches and angry words.

CHAPTER XI.

MARY'S PRESENTATION.

DEDICATED TO GOD.

OBED of old was favored with many blessings from heaven because he kept the Ark of the Covenant in his house. Joachim and Anne, who had in their homes the true Ark of the Covenant, for the same reason increased in holiness and love for God. Yet they understood that this sacred treasure had only been loaned to them, and that God expected them to fulfil without any unnecessary delay the vow which they had made to Him, namely, to dedicate her to His service in the Temple at Jerusalem. Their hearts were filled with mingled love and pain as they thought of the approaching separation. Their feelings were similar to those of the Patriarch Abraham, when, in obedience to God's command, he prepared to lead forth to sacrifice his only son who had been sent to him in a miraculous manner by God Himself.

Mary was now about three years old, but large for her age. In natural development of mind she was away ahead of children of the same age. While in knowl-

edge and virtue and other supernatural endowments, she was the most perfect creature that ever lived, or ever will live on earth. She loved her parents with an exceedingly tender filial affection. She soon discovered their ill-concealed grief and anguish, and prayed to her Father in heaven to afford herself and them the strength necessary for the approaching sacrifice. The Lord heard her prayer and strengthened the hearts of the sorrowing parents against the hour of separation.

The divine spouse, closely as she was bound in all the ties of affection to her beloved parents and their happy home, yet longed impatiently from the depths of her pure soul to serve her Creator in His holy Temple, and to live for Him alone. To any faint objections from her lonely parents, she would respond tenderly in words similar to those used later by her own divine Son when, without her knowledge, He remained in the temple: "Do you not know that I must be about My Father's business. (Luke ii. 49.)

From the days of Moses, it was the custom among the Jews for a band of young girls to dwell near the Tabernacle, and later on near Solomon's Temple. These maidens, who were required to make a vow of virginity for a term of years, served the Lord in one of the outer courts of the Temple. Devout widows, too, were permitted, though as an exception to the rule, to take this vow. We have an instance of this in the prophetess Anna, "who departed not from the temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day." (Luke ii. 37.) This devout widow, however, was appointed to take care of the young girls who served in the Temple. It was her duty to guard them against temptation, to educate them, and to bring them up with reference to their future callings in life. Of course, she followed the wishes or the vows of the parents of the children.

For the future Mother of God, this presentation in the Temple and her sojourn within its consecrated walls had a very special destiny and a most mysterious significance. Here, from her tenderest maidenhood, she was entirely and exclusively dedicated to the Lord and His service. Here she was inducted into the mysteries, prophecies, promises, prototypes, and figures of the Holy Scriptures. Here, in a holy nearness to God and under the most copious showers of God's grace-dews, her heart and her soul were filled with intense and constant yearnings for the divine Redeemer, with a disinterested love for God and her neighbor, and with an invincible aversion for all sin, which she looked upon as grievous injury to the all-high majesty of God. Yes, God Himself wished to superintend in His own Temple the training of the future Mother of His beloved Son.

THE JOURNEY TO THE TEMPLE.

The time for leaving her mother's home had arrived. According to the best calculations, it was about the middle of November, in a dreary and cold season, when St. Joachim and Saint Anne began their journey of sacrifice towards Jerusalem. We can ascertain with tolerable accuracy from the following circumstances that the journey took place at this season of the year. As we learn from the Gospel, Mary was closely related to St. Zachary and St. Elizabeth, the venerable parents of St. John, the forerunner of Christ. Zachary being a priest, was therefore obliged once or twice in the year to make a journey of five miles, from Hebron to Jerusalem, in order to discharge his priestly duties in the Temple.* Of

* The priests were divided into twenty-four orders or choirs, who exercised their exalted office by turns.

course, it would be for the pious parents of Mary a special honor and consolation to be able to entrust their beloved child to a priestly acquaintance and friend. Hence they arranged to have their visit at the same time that Zachary would come to the Temple. They fixed the time of their oblation to meet his day of priestly duty.*

Over the weary road to the Holy City, the three-year-old chosen one hastened on wings of holy impatience. Having completed their journey, the entry to the Temple was quiet and devoid of all display. The Temple stood on Mount Moria. A flight of fifteen steps, each one with a rise of several inches, led up to the chief entrance. Now, it was wonderful to see with what ease and agility the three-year-old child eagerly ascended these steps. Above, waiting near the Golden Gate, stood the venerable gray-haired priest Zachary, ready to receive the spotless victim to be offered up. Having entered the sacred halls, the devout parents threw themselves in deep emotion on the ground, with their child between them, in order to adore the living God. With a joyous heart Mary returned thanks to the God of Israel, for having judged her worthy of the privilege to serve Him in His own house, and she offered herself up to Him, to be His servant forever. Then took place the offering or presentation and the rendering of gifts. What a glorious spectacle for heaven and earth, for angels and men! With what complacency God the Father accepted the offering of His pure daughter; God the Son of His future Mother; God the Holy Ghost of His immaculate spouse! What rejoicing, what congratulations among the choirs of heavenly spirits, when they beheld their youthful Queen placed nearer to them, and entering upon duties which resembled

* St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, and George of Nicomedia relate that it was St. Zachary who received the Blessed Virgin into the service of the Temple.

those that they performed, namely, of serving and praising God.

You, too, Christian reader, rejoice at the God-pleasing sacrifice of the Blessed Virgin and her parents. Unite with it the sacrifice of yourself, of your body, your soul, your joys, your sufferings, your struggles, your hopes, your present and past, so that all these may be offered through the hands of the most worthy high-priestess Mary to the most high God, and thus, passing through her hands, may be pleasing in His eyes.

With child-like confidence, speak to Mary in the Temple. O ever-blessed Virgin Mary full of grace! from the bottom of my heart, I congratulate thee, and with fervor do I rejoice to know that by virtue of thy self-oblation in the Temple, thou wast accepted by God and adopted as His true daughter, as His best-loved child among men. I unite myself with thee in thy desire for self-oblation, in thy devotion, in thy purity, in thy humility. Obtain for me the grace to offer myself without reserve to God, at least as far as my position in life and its duties demand and permit. Alas, how many unfaithful hours in His service have I to lament, from the time of my childhood till the present day! How often have I fixed my heart's affections on the vain things of this earth, on the fleeting pleasures of time! In my folly, the God of eternal love could find no place in my heart. O sublime Virgin, through the merits of thy God-appeasing offering and presentation, obtain for me a constant and disinterested love for my Lord and Saviour.

TWO-FOLD DEDICATION OF THE CHRISTIAN.

The solemn entrance of Mary into the Temple and her presentation or offering to God during the earliest and tenderest years of her life must necessarily, Christian

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reader, remind you of two solemn and important events in your own life. These two events which in a certain sense resemble the presentation in the Temple of the immaculate spouse of heaven are your holy Baptism and your First Communion, for on both occasions you were brought to God's temple and to a certain extent dedicated to the most high God.

Christian reader, great are the mercies of God, immeasurable the graces that were poured into your soul through the holy Sacrament of Baptism. Then was your immortal soul purified from the disgrace, cleansed from the guilt of original sin, redeemed from the slavery of Satan, and stamped with the seal of predilection and with the sign of a renewed heirship to the kingdom of your heavenly Father. In slight acknowledgment of this infinite benefit your godfather and godmother, speaking for you, made solemnly in your name the holy promise that you would do what in any case you would be obliged to do in recognition of your creation, that is to say, you would during the whole of your life renounce the devil with all his pride and works, and serve God, the all-holy One, in undying faith and love. Thus, Christian reader, you were in the earliest hours of your life consecrated to the Lord by a solemn vow and pledge. Thank, then, to-day and during all the days of your life, your merciful Father in heaven for these undeserved graces, namely, that you were by the door of holy Baptism admitted into the one true Church, to the faith and communion of the children of God. From the bottom of your heart lament that you so often and perhaps so grievously fell away from your baptismal innocence, and thus broke and violated the sacred treaty made betwixt yourself and your God. Present yourself and offer yourself anew to-day, in union with your loving and beloved Mother Mary, to your Lord, to His service and His love.

Christian reader, as a fair and beautiful landscape emerging from the icy grasp of winter is lit up, warmed, and gloriously beautified unconsciously by the golden light of the sun in returning springtide, so was your soul illumined and bathed unconsciously in the burning rays of heaven's graces, which dispelled and loosened the freezing cold of original sin. Unconsciously too was it reunited to God by holy and mysterious ties. All that took place at your Baptism without your knowledge, was repeated in a far higher sense and renewed to a higher degree with your own free will, and with whatever knowledge you possessed at that maturer age of First Communion time. Then did the Almighty God offer Himself to you with His divinity and humanity, and with the plenitude of His grace and love. It is impossible to describe what then took place in your soul. Even at this late day, try to reawaken the sentiments that then overflowed your purified heart. Recall the childlike devotion, the unqualified confidence in God, the sincere sorrow for the small sins of your youth. Recall your feelings of happiness and of resolute determination when, of your own accord, you repeated and ratified your baptismal promises, and again renewed your offering of your whole being to God. Alas, O Lord! where are now those holy sentiments, what has become of those solemn pledges? Are they still alive in your heart or do they slumber? Perhaps they are totally extinct. Perhaps not a decade of years has yet passed by since that memorable day of your First Communion, the purest and brightest of your whole life. Yet how changed! If your pious director when preparing you for your First Communion and leading you up to the altar of the Lord had predicted that you would turn out to be the careless, lukewarm, forgetful Christian that you find your self to be to-day, you would not have believed him. On the contrary you would have protested with all the pre-

sumptuous indignation of St. Peter, who when warned by his blessed Lord that he would even deny Him, replied: "Although all shall be scandalized in Thee, I will never be scandalized." (Matt. xxxi. 33.) Yet, Christian reader, be not despondent. Take refuge in the sheltering arms of Mary, your friend and protector. But renew also the promises of your youth, uniting them fervently to the promises made by her in the Temple. You will thus obtain pardon, peace of conscience, and unfailing constancy.

THE CHRISTIAN SPOUSE.

For certain chosen souls, this presentation of Mary in the Temple has a special and very significant import. Such favorite souls enjoy besides the two already mentioned, still a third solemn entrance into the temple of God. This takes place on the momentous day of their religious profession, when, by virtue of their holy convent vows they consecrate themselves forever to the service of their Lord and Master. Throughout all the centuries of Christianity, without respect to the opposing ordinances of governments or other opposition of worldlings, God, by an inscrutable interposition of His divine grace, has called certain chosen souls to follow more closely, in the cloisters of religious life, the footsteps of Jesus Christ and of His consecrated Mother. Happy the soul whose lot it is to be thus chosen. With the Royal Psalmist, David, such a one can sing: "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts; my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord: they shall praise Thee forever and ever. For better is one day in Thy courts above thousands. I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners." (Ps. lxxxiii.)

It is a happy privilege for you, Christian reader, if you are one of those to whom a certain and positive call has been extended to serve in God's holy household by the practice of poverty, obedience, and chastity. If you have already found a haven of religious repose within the peaceful walls of a convent and have uttered before the Lord your holy vows, then consider yourself more privileged than the greatest potentate of earth. With Mary you have chosen the better part that shall not be taken away from you. Yet be careful lest you grow cold in your love for God and yield to a temptation to withdraw from Him the offering made in the early days of your religious life.

If you, Christian reader, are still tossed about amid the billows of worldly excitement, and from the midst of your peril peer anxiously through the misty atmosphere in search of a friendly harbor, imitate the careful and earnest sailor in search of a haven for his ship with its valuable cargo. Let not adverse winds bear you away from your holy purpose, especially if you discover signs within you of a call to a religious life. Be courageous and persevering. God, heaven, and your own soul are worth the struggle. But if your circumstances are such that although your desire is deeply, firmly, and ineffaceably planted in your heart you cannot reach the longed-for goal without extraordinary help from the hand of God, do not therefore yield to despair. The spirit of chastity, the spirit of obedience, the spirit of detachment from earthly things is to be found outside the convent walls. Let your quiet room become your cell, let your parish church be your convent chapel, let your parents and neighbors be your superiors, and let your heart, dear Christian, be your tabernacle where you may enjoy the uninterrupted, consoling presence of God.

Parents, too, are to be congratulated when the most

high God calls one of their children to His own special and exclusive service in religious life. Do not parents consider themselves and their family honored when a child of theirs is appointed by his fellow-citizens to a position of trust and dignity in his country's service? Are not St. Joachim and St. Anne, Mary's parents, to be felicitated because their only daughter found favor in the eyes of Ineffable Majesty? Can it be possible that Christian parents, who would gladly surrender a son to military service, to bloodshed and slaughter, would complain of his vocation to the service of God, and place in his way every possible obstacle when he would dedicate himself to the service of God at the altar?

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN THE TEMPLE ADVANCES IN WISDOM AND GRACE.

THE SEPARATION.

THE first hour spent by the newly consecrated virgin within the walls of the Temple was an hour of severe trial and great sacrifice; and yet an hour replete with merit for her soul. It was the hour of parting, of her separation from her beloved parents. This tender child of three years, we have hitherto contemplated not in her individual life, so to speak, but rather as identified with her parents, by whom she was cherished and cared.

She is now to lose suddenly this indispensable support of her childhood. But the loving child felt not only her own personal pain of parting, she was also deeply sensible

of that same pain as felt by her grieved parents. They, on their side, did all they could to conceal from their loved one the deep grief of their lacerated hearts. But the laws of nature exercise their irresistible force over the hearts even of saints, and Mary's immaculate heart was too transparent a mirror not to reflect the lightest shades and shadows of sorrow and loneliness that darkened the brows of her father and mother. Yet they were all, child and parents, void of every unworthy desire, and once again they renewed in spirit, by an act of the will and with a look towards heaven, the sacrifice just completed ; and the parting scene was brought to a close.

Together with the supernatural merits springing from this voluntary separation, the inexperienced child acquired a salutary natural advantage. She acquired a self-reliance far exceeding any that is ordinarily known at that early age, and which is peculiar only to those who in early life have been deprived of the all-ordering, all-guiding care of their mother. This circumstance was a part of heaven's plan. The future years and vicissitudes of the thorn-filled life of God's Mother demanded a fixed, self-reliant, and resolute character.

A NEW WORLD.

With great love and motherly tenderness, was the amiable child received by the pious women who had presided over the education of the young girls dwelling in the Temple. Such an humble, discreet, and loving nature manifested itself in the external conduct of the modest girl from Nazareth, such a noble, benevolent soul spoke forth from her bright, mild eyes, that she at once won the hearts of all. Mary paid special deference to every one of these maidens, and with friendly entreaty, besought them as her seniors who were familiar with the rules and

customs of the house and of its sacred service, to instruct her, to point out her faults, and to command her. She considered herself unworthy to associate with such pious servants of God. For the first few hours, the newcomer could hardly find a moment in which, alone and unseen, to pour forth to the Lord her feelings in a flow of gratitude. At last, when she found herself alone in her sleeping apartment, she threw herself on her face, poured forth her heart to God in joy and gratitude ; thanking Him for having deemed her worthy of the great favor of being received, without any merit of hers, as His servant in His holy dwelling-place. She prayed fervently, too, to the holy angels, that they would teach her how to serve her Lord and Master most worthily, and to order her mode of life according to His divine pleasure.

DAILY WORK.

It was the duty of the school of young girls dwelling in the Temple to add to the splendor of divine worship by chanting during the services. They had charge of the sacred vessels used at the sacrifices and other rites, they kept the hangings of the altar and the vestments of the priests in order and readiness. They assisted regularly at the morning and evening sacrifices, and had, besides, other stated times for prayer and study. Their remaining waking hours were devoted to work. They learned to spin flax and wool, to weave fine linens and silks, to make priestly garments out of precious gold and silver stuffs, and to embroider carpets and hangings for the Temple. The work of these young girls was renowned all through the Orient.

Our young pupil soon became the most skilful and distinguished among her companions. The Lord had indeed adorned her with every gift of nature and of grace. To

the high artistic taste and wonderful skill of the Blessed Virgin are we indebted for that seamless and woven garment which, according to time-honored tradition, she afterwards made for the divine Infant Jesus. The fervor of her deep-seated charity and love in the holy temple, the ardent zeal with which she performed every duty in the house of God, excited the admiration even of the chief priests, who looked upon her with wonder and reverence. Her outward demeanor, her graceful speech, her modesty and simplicity, her habit of always choosing the humblest and heaviest tasks and duties, edified her companions and delighted her tutors, and stimulated both to an increased love of God. Her soul floated in a holy and mysterious atmosphere. All her works, whether of a bodily or spiritual character, resembled the pure, light snowflakes that gently and solemnly fall on the mountain-sides. The field of snow on the mountain-top is already pure and white, and pure and white are the flakes that settle down upon it. Thus white is added to white, brilliancy to brilliancy, till the whole forms itself into a brilliant garment which, like the dazzling sun, compels men to withdraw their gaze. But who can penetrate into the deep and sacred recesses of the pure, deep-seated, burning, and disinterested charity, with which the heart of the Virgin burned? This living love for God was the queen, the mother, the life, the soul, the crown of all her other perfections. The foundation of this sacred ineffable charity was her sublime knowledge of God, as founded in faith, and which was more perfect in her than it was possible to be in any other created being. It is true, that as yet she did not see God in the light of unobstructed vision, but for that reason her merit was the greater, her love the more meritorious. This charity increased with every moment of her life, for in her immaculate existence, there could be no hindrance by sin to her mysterious advance-

ment. She alone of all created beings was the only one who could, and who can still, fulfil in the highest and most perfect degree the first and greatest commandment of the Law, which says : " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength. (Matt. xxii. 37.)

Among the occupations of Mary in the Temple, her chief one, and that which delighted her the most, was the reading of the Sacred Scriptures and hearing them explained. These holy writings, dictated by the Holy Spirit Himself, contain, indeed, the most glorious descriptions of the majesty, omnipotence, and mercy of God. They describe the wonderful dealings of God with His Chosen People. On every page they give evidence of the coming Redeemer, and point out clearly the " Desired of nations," the Comforter, the Prince of peace. How her heart was entranced with holy joy at the contemplation of God's miraculous doings ! How she gloried with a holy longing, and yearned and prayed that she might live to see the day of the promised Saviour ! Deep grief overpowered her soul as she read of the unaccountable ingratitude of man, as she read of the dreadful misery which sin entailed upon the human race. In the simplicity of her humble heart, how favored she considered the maiden who, according to the prediction of the Prophet Isaias, was to bring forth the Emmanuel That she, the queen of prophets, had entered deeply into the study and spirit of the sacred writings is evident from her own wonderful and beautiful canticle, the Magnificat, a production which, apart from the sublime prophecies it contains, has well deserved to find among all nations an undisputed renown as one of the grandest creations in scriptural poetry.

CHRISTIAN TRAINING OF YOUTH.

What a glorious picture is here presented to us of an educational training imbued with religion through and through. Oh, that all those parents who have children to educate, or those whose duty it is to educate them, would here learn in what true and saving education consists!

It is not always possible for the young boy or girl, especially if remote from day schools, to be brought up and properly educated at home. Under the parental roof it is not always possible to obtain the training necessary to fit a youth for the future exigencies of life. Thus arises for parents the serious necessity of entrusting their offspring to the care of strange hands for proper moulding during the most important years of boyhood or girlhood. The boy is sent to the academy or the college, the daughter is placed in an institute or a convent. Christian parents, should you not first examine and know and understand to whose care you are entrusting your most precious jewels? With far more caution and deliberation would you let out to a bank an insignificant sum of money than you do your children to a boarding-school, where, perhaps, God's name is never mentioned, where Christianity is ignored, where faith and morality and piety are unknown, or perhaps sneered at and despised. What keen and lifelong remorse and misery have many parents undergone in penalty for such want of discrimination in the choice of education for their children! How many a good son and daughter has left the parental roof, endowed with the precious treasure of the true faith, blessed with the fear of God and with childlike innocence, to enter a school, where at vast expense of time and money, a superficial, hollow, and most likely destructive form of education is obtained, while faith and piety are eliminated from the heart and soul of the pupil! Alas! the unsuspecting and inexperienced

child but follows and obeys the mandates of its blinded parents. As the prodigal son, in Our Lord's parable, went abroad among strangers, and there squandered the inheritance received from a kind father, so do the children of our day go forth from their father's house, enter godless schools, there to waste away their inheritance of faith and innocence. But these, alas! unlike the prodigal son, seldom come back and say as he did to his father: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee." When, after some years, they return to their father's home, they are imperious, conceited, cynical, capricious, captious, selfish, greedy, sensual, untruthful, haughty, and idle. They break up the domestic peace of the family, and not unfrequently bring to a premature grave their distressed parents who but too late have discovered their error.

Thanks be to God there are yet in the world, struggling against want of patronage, many places of Christian schooling which bear a great resemblance to that Temple-school at Jerusalem in which the Mother of God was educated. There are Catholic colleges that stand on a truly religious foundation, affording a good, safe, and practical training both for the duties of the family and for public life, and in which the soul of the pupil and its sanctification and elevation are held to be of paramount importance: where he is shielded and fortified against the disastrous influences of an irreligious generation. Such, Christian parents, is the only safe school for your children.

O Mary, best and wisest of pure virgins, I would fain remind thee of the countless advantages, the manifold graces, the bright enlightenments, the precious counsels that thou didst enjoy during thy sojourn in the Temple. Therefore, would I also implore thee that thou wouldst vouchsafe to impart to our educational establishments the

spirit of true wisdom and religion; that thou wouldst enlighten and guide all educators in the discharge of their grave and exalted duties; that thou wouldst impress upon the hearts of all Christian parents a strong sense of their obligation before God and man, of confiding their children's education to none but truly Christian educators. Thou knowest well, O wisest of virgins, that upon such education depends the weal or woe of whole nations, the eternal happiness or damnation of countless immortal souls.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MAKES A VOW OF VIRGINITY.

FROM the Holy Scriptures themselves, as well as from the writings of the Fathers of the Church, it is certain, beyond all doubt, that the Blessed Virgin pronounced a vow of perpetual virginity. When the Archangel Gabriel brought to this highly privileged spouse of St. Joseph the glad tidings that she was to become the Mother of the Most High, the astonished Virgin asked: "But how shall this come to pass, for I know not man." (Luke i. 34.) Indeed, Mary could not be in the fullest and highest sense the Virgin of virgins had she not willingly and unreservedly consecrated her virginity to the Lord.

We do not know at what period of her life Mary made this vow. Yet with good reason we may presume that she performed this solemn act of religion during her sojourn in the Temple. Then, certainly, circumstances of place and time would be most likely to bring about such an act of devotion.

This vow was made by Mary certainly before her espousal to St. Joseph, which event in her life, according to the custom of the Israelites, took place immediately after her departure from school at the Temple, when she was fifteen years of age. It is also certain that she took this vow at the special interposition of the Holy Ghost and with the full knowledge and perfect understanding of the imperatively binding effect and other momentous consequences of this solemn act of religion.

VOWS AMONG THE JEWS.

It would be very erroneous, Christian reader, to consider this vow of perpetual virginity made by our blessed Mother as a whimsical act of hers, resulting from the pious notions of a young and inexperienced girl, and made without special enlightenment from heaven, or without a keen sense of the sacrifice involved.

This vow of perpetual virginity is a peculiar, wonderful manifestation, never till that time known or heard of. Throughout the entire history of her people, Mary found no example of this nature. All the Jews, of every race and every tribe and every condition, even the priests and the high-priests, held the firm belief that they were in duty bound to embrace the married state. The daughter of Jephte, who in consequence of an ill-advised vow made by her father was condemned to die, complained, not indeed of her impending death, but because she had to die while yet a virgin. She prayed, therefore, for permission to go to the mountain, before she would be sacrificed, in order there to bewail her virginity with other maidens who were her companions. (Judges xi. 38.) And as we know from the history of St. Anne, the mother of Mary, it was considered a disgrace for a woman to be childless. Mary, then, in pronouncing a vow of perpetual

virginity, acted in direct opposition to the spirit and notions of her nation, and in the eyes of the world condemned herself to a life of reproach. Content to take God for her portion, she was too far raised above the joys, the comforts, and the other advantages of married life, as well as above regard for those appearances that persons of her race and especially of her situation in life sought to find in matrimony. She was perfectly willing with all her heart to live alone and neglected and without friends, in that lowly state to which all unmarried persons were subjected by reason of the reproach cast upon such by the customs of her people.

THE VOW AND THE PROMISED REDEEMER.

Yet the sacrifice made by Mary in pronouncing this vow during her tenderest years was of infinitely great importance. She belonged to the tribe of Juda and knew that from this very tribe the promised and desired Messias was to spring forth. She was also of the house and family of King David, and she knew, too, this same Messias was to be born of that royal race. Moreover, many of the prophecies predicted that the coming of the Redeemer was near at hand, nay, would take place just then, and within Mary's lifetime. Such was, indeed, the general expectation among Jews and Samaritans. It was not, however, generally understood among the masses of the people that this expected Redeemer of the world would be conceived by a woman in an altogether supernatural, miraculous, and mysterious manner. Nay, even the Blessed Virgin appears to have entertained the opinion that the Messias would be born according to the laws of nature. Her words to the angel demonstrate this opinion of her, for she inquired: "How can this come to pass, for I know not man."

Hence, when she made her vow of virginity she renounced, according to the universally accepted opinion of her own people, and even according to her own opinion, all hopes and all thoughts of ever becoming the Mother of the Messias. This renunciation she made with a full knowledge of the facts. She made it too through a deep sense of humility, for she deemed herself unworthy the high honor of being the Mother of the Redeemer of the world. If she knew that He was to be born of another, she would not dream of envying the favored one.

My God, how wonderful are Thy ways! Thy wisdom accomplishes its ends by ways and means that to us appear contrary to Thy purposes and contradictory within themselves. Who would have thought at that time that this very vow of perpetual virginity, an act of religion unknown among the Jews, or, if known, despised by them, should prove to be the indispensable condition for becoming the Mother of the God-Man. In order to merit and secure the dignity of Mother of God, Mary was obliged to first renounce all the dignity and honor of motherhood.

THE VOW IN CHRISTIANITY.

King David, Mary's royal ancestor, who once saw her in a prophetic vision, thus speaks of the virgin Mother: "After her, shall virgins be brought to the king. They shall be brought with gladness and rejoicing; they shall be brought into the temple of the king." (Ps. xliv. 16.) Yes, indeed, Mary is truly the first, the leader, the very Queen of all other virgins. Previous to her lifetime, untouched virginity, that fairest flower of heaven, was hardly to be found on earth. But since her choice of that holy state, and in imitation of her example, that lovely flower has sprung up and bloomed and blossomed into

heavenly fruit in the virginal hearts and souls of thousands and millions of daughters of the Church.

I allude here not to the vows of chastity that are so sacredly identified with the priesthood whether out in the world or sheltered behind religious ramparts. I would speak rather of those angelic women who, in imitation of their holy mistress and model, chose for their part a life of perpetual virginity in the world. Throughout all the long centuries of Christianity, there have been in the Church heroic persons, young people of both sexes, who by the grace of God have kept their souls pure and intact, and have dedicated to the honor of God and Mary the noblest attribute of their human lives, namely, an untarnished purity of soul and body. Such persons have had the courage and such unbounded confidence in God's assistance that, although living in the world and its dangers, though threatened by the cravings of their own individual passions and by the temptations of the devil, yet they have succeeded bravely in preserving this treasure even in a frail earthen vessel, have carried it uninjured through life's long journey here below, and have finally presented it to their Lord through the hands of the Blessed Mother. Christian heroes and heroines, you who have imitated or who still do imitate the sublime example of the Blessed Virgin, I admire your spirit of sacrifice more than I do that of the holy martyrs, who in a few moments, or, at most, in a few hours, finish their contest and prove their fidelity to God and their faith; while you have to combat, to suffer, and to sacrifice your whole life through. Should this book fall into the hands of such a brave, virginal soul who, in the midst of worldly sensuality, like a lily amid the thorns, blooms and brings forth fruit only for the honor or love of his Creator; or should it fall in the hands of some chaste persons who have not yet decided upon any future course of life, and

yet in the depths of their hearts feel the courage, the impulse, the call from heaven to dedicate themselves entirely to God, then would I venture to say to such highly privileged spouses of Christ: Be brave and steadfast, favored souls. With joy and veneration do the angels look down upon you, for you resemble themselves. With motherly affection and with mighty power does the immaculate Virgin Mary throw her sheltering cloak around you, for you are her pupils and imitators. With the sweetness of divine love the heavenly Bridegroom will fill your heart and more than compensate you for the fleeting, transient, worldly love that you have laid down at His feet. The eternal Judge will find you waiting like the wise and prudent virgins who all through life carry in their hands the pure oblation of love and the burning light of good example. Therefore He will invite you to the eternal wedding-feast in heaven.

The virtuous maiden has in the world a high and noble sphere of duty. By her prayer she effects a great amount of good. By her virtuous example she can work an immense beneficial influence on her fellow-beings. By her quiet and disinterested spirit of sacrifice she can discharge vast and varied duties of benevolence. Is not the Christian maiden who, according to the teachings of St. Paul, thinks only of what appertains to God, and is busied solely with her efforts to preserve purity of mind and body, is she not, so to speak, a holy temple in which God may dwell? Her heart becomes a very altar on which burns the incense of devout prayer.

The unthinking person may ask: Of what use in this busy, practical world is the female who does not marry and thus found a family? We answer: She prays, she frequents our sanctuaries, from which many of our people are necessarily kept away by their family cares and occupations.

The maiden prays with a pure and undivided heart. She brings to God in that undivided heart a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice which she is, strictly speaking, not obliged to make; hence she propitiates heaven and brings down its blessings and graces on the hearts of sinners and on a world made arid by the stifling heat of passion.

By her example, the Christian maiden may become an eloquent and effective preacher of good. The vain and thoughtless rush headlong through the highways of avarice, pleasure, and even of sensuality, forgetful of God and of their own eternal destiny. If in their wanderings they meet a noble and self-denying maiden, they find in her a gentle monitor, an earnest guide, a just reproach to their forgetfulness of their own eternal welfare, a rebuke to their ignorance of their own spiritual danger. Hence it may well happen that these quiet monitors frequently incur, to a very unlimited extent, the scoffs and general disfavor of the votaries of the world.

Those Christians who are able to offer themselves up to God, are by consequence able and willing to dedicate themselves to the welfare of their fellow-beings. Observe the countless multitudes of those daughters of the Church who, like an army in full march, are pressing forward in unselfish eagerness, ready to support their Church, or, if need be, to bring aid and comfort to every grade of human misery. They have taken leave of their families and bidden farewell to the domestic happiness of their mother's home. Hence they are free and untrammelled and prepared to direct their steps wherever the voice of God calls them. Neither sword nor fire, nor contagion, nor death itself can extinguish the fires of divine charity glowing in their breasts. They are to be found on the battle-field, comforting the dying, alleviating their sufferings, and pointing towards heaven. They glide silently among the beds in the hospitals, tending the sick; and in

the discharge of this labor of love inhaling the poisoned and infected atmosphere, never once thinking that the next morning's sun may rise on their own death-beds. Carried on the wings of charity, they hurry through the streets of our city, and are nowhere so numerous as when and where the danger is greatest. Wherever tears are to be dried, wounds to be healed, the naked to be clothed, the hungry to be fed, there are the virgin daughters of the Church to be found. How many glorious deeds of self-sacrifice performed by maidens in the honored garb of religion, and as well by the daughters of the Church in the simpler garb of the world, will be revealed to the world on the Last Day, when the Supreme Judge and Rewarder of good shall appear. Then shall we learn how much many a father and many a mother, who perhaps gave a slow and reluctant consent to the choice of their daughters, are indebted for their own salvation to the merits of a virtuous child of theirs, of a pure and innocence-crowned soul. What a wealth of good works will be there presented to our admiring gaze! O Mary, virgin consecrated to God! awake, maintain, increase in all young and innocent hearts sentiments of holy purity. Raise up in these times of ours, so given over to sensual gratification, many models and examples of sublime self-denial. Strengthen, guide, and keep under thy care those heroic souls who have already entered on the rough and narrow way so shunned and condemned by worldlings. Encourage these valiant maidens, by directing their thoughts and, hopes to the unfading crowns awaiting them in heaven where the the virgins are singing a new canticle before the throne of God, and following the Lamb in a white-robed procession. (Apoc. xiv. 3.)

PART III.

ESPOUSED TO ST. JOSEPH.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN LEAVES THE TEMPLE.—SHE IS ESPOUSED TO ST. JOSEPH.

MARY BECOMES AN ORPHAN.

CLOUDLESS, bright, and fleeting as a fair spring morning, passed the twelve happy years spent by Mary within the secluded and peaceful precincts of the Temple. But now a grave and painful event breaks in upon her happiness and fills her hitherto peaceful heart with sadness; for about this time, as tradition avers, St. Joachim and St. Anne both died, and Mary became an orphan.

A secret presentiment of the approaching bereavement had already taken possession of her heart. But as the will of God was the only rudder of her life and of her own will she submitted uncomplainingly to Divine Providence, and with a ready heart offered up to God the sacrifice that He was now about to require at her hands. First, as we are told, she heard the sad news of the approaching death of her tenderly beloved father. Probably she was permitted to hasten to his bedside, to cherish him, to comfort him in his last hours, and to re-

ceive his dying blessing. With what love, with what terderness, with what resignation of soul she discharged these filial duties! When the earthly bonds of the venerable patriarch begun gradually and gently to dissolve, how fervently she renewed in her heart, during every succeeding moment, her sacrifice of separation from her father, and poured out her thanks for having had so good a parent, as well as for his happy and edifying death.

As one trial seldom comes unaccompanied by another, so in this instance the Lord was pleased to add to this one still another even more painful. During their long and God-fearing lives, St. Joachim and St. Anne had been closely united in their constant love for God and for each other. In the hours of sorrow and in time of happiness they were as one. Becoming, then, it was that in death they should not be kept far apart. St. Anne soon followed her lamented companion to the grave. This was, if possible, a deeper sorrow, a keener pang for the already afflicted heart of the Blessed Virgin; for she now felt that she was indeed an orphan. Poor, neglected, and alone, she knelt over the graves that contained all that was dear to her on earth. But raising her tearful eyes, her trembling hands, and her bleeding heart towards heaven, with unbounded confidence she threw herself into the fatherly embrace of God, and repeated the words of David, her own royal ancestor: "Be Thou my helper, forsake me not, do not Thou despise me, O God my Saviour. For my father and my mother have left me: but the Lord hath taken me up. Set me, O Lord, a law in Thy way and guide me in the right path." (Ps. xxvi. 9–11.)

SHE DEPARTS FROM THE TEMPLE.

Springtime cannot last always. In nature's year as well as in man's life its moments are but too transient

and fleeting. The Blessed Virgin had now completed her fourteenth year. Owing to the rapid and early development of mind and body peculiar to the Eastern climes, she was even at that tender age a full-grown, beautiful young woman, fair to every beholder, as Jericho's fairest rose. Her education in the Temple was now completed, and she found herself standing on the solemn threshold of life, with its unknown dangers and grave duties staring her in the face. The priests of the sanctuary announce to her that the time has arrived, when, in accordance with the custom of her nation, and even with the law as given by Moses, she should be placed under the protection of a suitable husband; adding also that this step should be taken even with less delay, inasmuch as she was an orphan without a safe and suitable home, and alone and unprotected in the world. Even if the death of her beloved parents had not succeeded in awakening the innocent maiden from the pleasant dream of childhood, this decision and declaration of the priests would have caused her to realize the fact that she must now no longer depend on her preceptors, or shield herself behind the protecting walls of her school. Should she venture to unveil to her superiors the delicate treasure of her heart, the secret, though well-advised, vow of perpetual virginity? But even the Jewish priests would not have understood, and certainly would have appreciated still less, this heroic determination of hers, for it stood in direct opposition to all the notions and even to the laws of her nation.

But the Blessed Virgin had made this vow not to please men, but out of pure love for God. Not from men, therefore, but from God, did she hope and expect to receive help and strength. Her tears moved heaven, her prayers reached the throne of grace and were heard. While at her devotions she received an assurance from

heaven that the Almighty Himself would enable her to keep her vow ; that He would provide for her a spouse, who, instead of being an obstacle, would be a true, holy, and just protector of her virginity.

The pious maiden believed firmly that she would discover in her heart the divine will. But the priests persisted in their purpose. She was forced, therefore, to the sad conclusion that she must take leave of her happy abode in the Temple. At the very thought of the coming separation, her heart was stirred to its depths with grief and desolation. Here she had passed twelve happy and blessed years, dwelling near to God's presence. Here she had been loved and cherished with the tenderest affection by her priests, teachers, and companions. Now her heart was filled with a mysterious misgiving concerning her future life, and she would gladly have sheltered herself forever behind the Temple walls from the impending storms of the future. Once again, before leaving, she visited all her favorite spots in the garden, every cherished room in her school. Again she repeated to the Most High the most heartfelt, the most deep-seated, and sincere acts of gratitude for all the pious teachings, benefits, and graces received within its walls. Over and over again she expressed to the chief priests, to her devoted teachers, and to her sorrowing companions, her sincere thanks for their unceasing kindness to her throughout the twelve years she had passed in their midst. She humbly asked their pardon for all her shortcomings, and for any pain of which she might have been the unwilling cause. All those whose happy privilege it was to have known the Blessed Virgin were deeply pained to see this pious and affectionate soul taking her departure. It was now twelve years since she had come to the school in the Temple little more than an infant. Now grown to woman's estate, she descends its grand staircase, on her way to the turbid and uncertain

world before her. Behind her, in the Temple itself, it seemed as if its light in the sanctuary had gone out, and the angel of the altar had vanished.

CHOICE OF A SPOUSE.

As Mary was the last living female descendant of her tribe, and at the same time a daughter of inheritance, the law required of her that she should wed one of her own tribe. "And this is the law promulgated by the Lord touching the daughters. Let them marry to whom they will, only so that it be to men of their own tribe; lest the possession of the children of Israel be mingled from tribe to tribe. For all men shall marry wives of their own tribe and kindred; and all women shall take husbands of the same tribe; that the inheritance may remain in the families, and that the tribes be not mingled one with another but remain so." (Num. xxxvi. 6–9.)

Mary's late preceptors in the Temple, in union with the priests, called together all the eligible unmarried men of the house of David, in order that from among them should be chosen, in the usual manner, a suitable husband for the daughter of Joachim and Anne. Already had the name of Mary become well known. Owing to her great personal beauty as well as on account of her extraordinary virtues, she had unwittingly acquired a widespread reputation. She had, moreover, received a very thorough education, was sprung from an ancient and honored royal family, and was not entirely devoid of a dowry, small though it was. When a bride among the Jews was not a daughter of inheritance, then the bridegroom endowed the bride, very seldom receiving a marriage portion from her or from her parents. Thus it is certain that in this case the sons of the best families were present, and that any one of them would have considered himself fortunate to be

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permitted, to conduct this noble maiden to his home as his bride.

When all whose business it was to take part in this selection of a spouse for Mary had met together in the outer hall of the Temple, their first act was to unite in a fervent prayer to the God of their fathers, beseeching Him as the Director and Guide of all human affairs to so direct them now that their choice might be in accordance with His holy will. They then proceeded to cast lots, for such was their ancient practice in such affairs.* Those among the young men who flattered themselves on being in the possession of means, of mental acquirements, and of good personal appearance were confident and hopeful, and watched eagerly the result of the lottery. But there was one man who stood apart, though still complying with the requirements of the case. Retiring, humble, and modest, he stood with downcast eyes, unnoticed by any around him, for he was old and evidently a member of the working-class of people. He had come to the gathering because the law required the presence of all unmarried men on such occasions, and their participation in the ceremonies. But whether this hesitating and retiring person had no intention nor desire to marry, or whether he considered himself unworthy to expect the hand and heart of so noble and virtuous a maiden, he prayed to the Lord with child-like simplicity and earnestness that He would not permit the lot to fall upon him.

Here again, Christian reader, recognize clearly and with satisfaction, the wonderful power of Divine Providence. Contrary to all human expectations and in opposition to the hopes and wishes of all, the lot fell upon

* St. Jerome and the ancient writers relate that every aspirant for a bride had to present an olive branch with his name written on it. He whose branch began to blossom during the night was the chosen bridegroom.

the aged, humble man who stood apart. He alone corresponded to the mysterious designs which God had in view, making him the guardian and defender of the purity of heart of the bride and spouse of Heaven. This holy and venerable and privileged man, has been from that hour to the present day revered, esteemed, highly favored, highly honored, and dearly beloved. Wherever and whenever, throughout God's earth, the holy names of Jesus and Mary are mentioned with love and confidence, there is never missing the glorious name of St. Joseph.

Although this result of the casting of lots was not such as to flatter, judging by outward appearances at least, any ordinary bride, yet Mary with her whole heart gladly accepted the result; for in her inmost soul she felt assured, indeed she heard a mysterious voice assuring her, that this bridegroom was the one destined and set apart by God to respect, honor, and protect her sacred vow of virginity. Moreover, she felt in her heart a leaning towards this venerable servant of God, that was founded in sentiments of esteem, veneration for him, and in a mutual love for God.

THE ESPOUSALS.

In accordance with the custom of their people, the betrothal of Mary and Joseph was solemnized without delay. The youthful and immaculate bride, in all her natural and supernatural beauty, shone with all the brilliancy of the rising sun. A delicate blush of modesty sat upon her brow, her cheeks were mantled with the glow of ruddy health, and her eyes were brilliant with the light of holy purity, as St. Joseph placed upon her finger a plain and simple ring * as a symbol of the endurance and endlessness of their mutual love.

* In the Church of St. Lawrence in Perugia this ring is still preserved, and every year on the 3d of August it is shown to the people:

If God was pleased to choose, in this way, St. Joseph to be the spouse of the Queen of angels and the future foster-father of the Son of God, it was because this simple and unpretending man possessed rich treasures of sanctity and grace, such indeed as the very angels in heaven might envy. He was chosen because his virtues elevated him, in the eyes of God, higher than the highest in the land. In the Book of Life his name stood forth, inscribed in letters of gold, more brilliant than that of the greatest earthly potentate. The Virgin was given, therefore, not to the mightiest, nor to the richest, but to the most humble and most worthy son of Nazareth.

A few months later, the ever-blessed Virgin was espoused to St. Joseph. The ceremony took place amid pomp and solemnity, as was customary even among the poorer classes in Israel. But the grandest and most brilliant splendor of the feast shone forth from the chaste, God-loving, God-fearing souls of the bride and bridegroom.

As now, by this important and significant ceremony, the ever-blessed Virgin was entrusted to the protecting arm of St. Joseph, as she was henceforth to honor and obey him and to love him sincerely, devotedly, and trustingly, as her friend, spouse, and protector, you, Christian reader, would know and understand but very imperfectly the life of your blessed Mother if you did not also at the same time learn to know the life, adorned as it is with many virtues, of her holy spouse, who assumed so important a place in the great plan of man's redemption.

Are you, Christian reader, a zealous and devoted servant of St. Joseph? If you are not, then you must not flatter yourself that you are a true and devoted child of Mary, his spouse.

pious bridal couples have their rings touched to it. (J. B. Lauri Perusini, *Comment. de annulo pronubo Deiparæ virginis.* Colon, 1626.)

Some notice, then, of the life of this grand and holy patriarch may serve to stimulate your love and veneration both for St. Joseph himself and for his immaculate spouse.

CHAPTER XV.

ST. JOSEPH IS PREPARED BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND HIS OWN CO-OPERATION FOR HIS HIGH AND HOLY OFFICE.

WHEN we consider the high dignity bestowed upon St. Joseph during his lifetime and after his death, both on earth and in heaven ; when we realize the praise bestowed upon him by the Holy Ghost in styling him "a just man ;" when, from the sanctity of his pure spouse, we infer his own holiness, we must feel convinced beyond all doubt that he was a vessel of abounding grace and a man of the most glorious personal virtues ; that he passed his youth in holy innocence and the salutary fear of the Lord, and in prayer and labor ; thus constituting him a most perfect and attractive model for every Christian young man.

ST. JOSEPH IS A VESSEL OF GRACE.

As Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and St. John, His holy forerunner, were called into existence, not so much through the natural intervention of their pious parents as through a miracle of grace wrought by the omnipotence of God, we may, therefore, with good reason suppose that the foster-father of the Redeemer was also a child of grace from heaven.

As St. Joachim and St. Anne loved, nurtured, and guarded their daughter from the first moment of her existence as a precious gift from heaven, so, too, did St. Joseph's father, Jacob, in union with his devout wife, offer up their child to God at the time of his birth. This offering they from day to day renewed, sanctified, and augmented by the prayers and other good works which they performed for the benefit of their beloved son. But with still more care, and with still deeper love than a human parent's heart is capable of, did the all-seeing eye of the Father in heaven watch over His chosen and favorite boy, Joseph.

Having been trained in his childhood and taught his prayers and the first elements of knowledge by his devoted parents, St. Joseph then received an education in keeping with the circumstances and necessities of those times. His literary attainments were confined principally to the one necessary branch, namely, a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and of God's wonderful works and dispensations contained in them, but more especially of the hopeful expectation of the early coming of the Saviour of mankind. As he read these holy pages, how his young heart throbbed with a holy longing; how his youthful imagination pictured to itself the splendor and glory of the future kingdom of God! Yet he never dreamt that he himself would be one of its earliest mainstays and ornaments. This unusually clear and profound comprehension of the Scriptures by St. Joseph was, of course, the effect of divine grace.

One of the most prominent traits in the character of our saint, and one which shone with the quiet but steady and constant brilliancy of a fixed star, was his ever-recurring submission to the holy will of God. He would rather look for a miracle, for an apparition from heaven, than act according to his own discretion. This complete

submission to God's providence had the effect of implanting in the boy's soul that germ of heaven's grace, which carried him uninjured through the storms and battles of early manhood.

A second and no less admirable characteristic of St. Joseph was his preference for a quiet, retired, and silent life. What would he do in the tumult of public life? What would he talk about, he in the sanctuary of whose heart heaven's bliss was dwelling and everlasting truth shining? This quiet retirement afforded him ample time and opportunity for prayer and gave him a relish and taste for the enjoyment of holy meditation. Gently and gradually, yet powerfully and effectively, grace raised his heart to that sacred and sublime nearness to God in which he was to dwell for nearly thirty subsequent years, during the lifetime of Jesus Christ.

ST. JOSEPH'S STRUGGLES AND VICTORIES.

Do not suppose, Christian reader, that the grace of God had wedded the heart of St. Joseph so closely to heaven, and with such irresistible force, that it could not be reached by the emotions of its own concupiscence and the enticements of the world and of hell. The life of every man on earth is a battle. But our youthful saint, strongly fortified with grace, knew how to do battle and to defend himself. What St. Paul at a later day demanded from every Christian, that did St. Joseph perform even before God, the Truth Eternal, had taught us by the lips of His only begotten Son the mode of warfare we are to follow.

"Put you on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil; for our wrestling is not against flesh and blood: but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness against the spirits of wickedness in the high places.

Therefore take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace: in all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one: and take unto you the helmet of salvation: and the sword of the spirit (which is the word of God). By all prayer and supplication praying at all times in the spirit: and in the same watching with all instance." (Eph. vi. 11–18.)

But besides these weapons of the spirit and of prayer, St. Joseph did not neglect to make use of natural helps. Among these, the principal and most effective is untiring industry. The truth taught by St. Benedict, one of the best and most experienced teachers of asceticism (Benedict, *Reg.*, cap. 48), that idleness is an enemy of man's soul, was already revealed to St. Joseph's enlightened mind. Hence he resolved, descendant though he was of an ancient and renowned royal family, to learn and to follow the trade of a carpenter. And as with skill, industry, and perseverance, he formed shapely articles out of the rough lumber, he at the same time moulded more and more his own soul after the ever-beautiful likeness of God.

In this way, too, by grace and his own efforts, St. Joseph sanctified himself and prepared the way for the designs of God. That he was really dead to the world and its pleasures appears from a special circumstance. The holy Fathers assure us that, like the ever-blessed Virgin, St. Joseph in his youth, contrary to the customs and opinions of the Jewish nation, made a vow of perpetual virginity.

This opinion is strengthened by the fact that St. Joseph at the time of his betrothal to the Blessed Virgin was very old, having passed far beyond the years when the

young men of Palestine usually entered on the holy state of matrimony.* Had not God ordained otherwise, and had not the law of his country so demanded, he would gladly have made a sacrifice in this case. His course of action under the present circumstances but shows forth more clearly to our view the rich treasures of nobility and sanctity concealed within his humble breast. Here, too, we discover a strong resemblance between the two hearts of Mary and Joseph.

Christian young man! look boldly into that shining mirror presented to your contemplation in the life of St. Joseph. Study it well, in order that you may be appalled at the sad picture of deformity in which your own entire life, but especially the years of your youth, are depicted.

Has not the same eye of God watched over you with equal care from your earliest years? Did not a pious, prudent father and a devout, anxious mother kneel at the side of your crib? Have not the torrents of God's holy grace flowed in upon your soul in the waters of your baptism? Have not the sunny rays of God's blessing shone upon you in the innocent days of your childhood? Did not your Lord and your Saviour enter into your very being with all His divine substance on the day of your First Communion? Did not the Spirit of Truth and Fortitude ennoble and fortify your soul, making you, in holy Confirmation, a soldier of Jesus Christ? Surely, in consideration of these and so many other graces, your blessed Lord can with right and truth say to your soul: "What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it." (Is. v. 4.)

In this, your model, discover the way that leads to both earthly and eternal happiness; the way to internal and external peace. If, hitherto, you have trod the ways of

* St. Epiphanius gives his age at eighty years.

God's commandments without grievous errors, St. Joseph will strengthen and steady you in your virtuous course. Pray to him for perseverance. If, perchance, an occasional passing storm has withered the flowers of your innocence and of love for God, do not despond. His powerful intercession will raise you up from your fall, guard you against future falls, and comfort you with God's grace God's peace, God's love. But forget not this truth: There is no triumph without a battle; without victory there can be no crown.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHY THE BLESSED VIRGIN WAS ESPOUSED TO ST. JOSEPH.

ON first thought we are somewhat surprised and disconcerted, perhaps disedified, at the mere mention of the marriage ceremony between the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. It is not without perplexity that we behold the Mother of God, whom we have been taught to regard as being far above and superior to all ordinary human circumstances, enter upon the duties of domestic family life through her marriage with St. Joseph. Has not this a tendency to weaken and lessen the esteem entertained for her by all believing Christians? Have not these relations often been misinterpreted and understood awrong? Would it not have been more glorious for the sublime Mother of God, and for her only begotten Son, if the virginity of the mother and the heavenly origin of the Son had been made more manifest to the world and thus been more fully recognized and honored? Christian reader, let us adore in profoundest humility the mysterious

designs and the wise operations of Divine Providence. Profound mysteries of grave truths are concealed within this economy and operation of God. But even if, in the weakness of our understandings, we can find no grounds for this mysterious disposition, we must acknowledge it to be the wisest and most fitting. Yet, for our instruction, the holy Fathers of the Church allege many reasons why the Blessed Virgin, though consecrated to God, should be outwardly married to the carpenter from Nazareth. Weigh these reasons for your own edification and for the strengthening of your believing faith.

THE PLAN OF THE ATONEMENT REQUIRED IT.

In the first place, it was God's holy will that the chosen Mother of God should not exempt herself from that law which awarded to maternal dignity the preference over maidenhood, the more so as her holy vow would not be at all considered as an excuse for her singleness of life. Thus, at a later day and in a similar way, did the same virgin Mother of God comply with the law of purification after the birth of her son, though, of course, she was in no way amenable to the law which might have been disregarded without any serious consequences for her.

In the second place, Mary was to be in fact a mother, though not through marriage, but by virtue of her virginity.

Jesus Christ, the Son of a virgin, and conceived in a supernatural way, would embody a truth which the Jews then, as now, would never have comprehended. Nay, they would have construed it into a most disgraceful scandal, and looked upon it in its worst light for the honor of Mary.

Why would they believe the assertion of the miraculous Mother, they who would not believe Eternal Truth Him-

self when He afterwards taught in their Temple and worked miracles before their eyes?

Doubtless they would have stoned the Mother of Jesus, had not her miraculous motherhood been veiled by a semblance of outward matrimony. If even the God-fearing St. Joseph, who, though firmly convinced of the extraordinary sanctity of his spouse, was nevertheless thrown into a state of perplexity and embarrassment on discovering the mystery of her maternity, what would those persons have thought who had not this fear of God nor this certainty of Mary's purity?

Moreover, in the third place, St. Joseph was not only a protection to Mary's honor and a guardian of safety to herself, but he was also an indispensable help to her in the bringing up and supporting of her divine Son, as well as in the trials and tribulations that afterwards came. Imagine, dear Christian, how the Blessed Virgin could have proceeded alone and unprotected on the journey to Bethlehem at Christmastide, or have made her escape to Egypt at the time of the slaughter of the Innocents. Even when accompanied by her faithful guardian and cheerful comforter, St. Joseph, these trials and hardships were hard to bear.

In the fourth place, St. Joseph was appointed to discharge most important duties towards the Son of Mary, the Saviour of the world. To this poor carpenter of Nazareth, the eternal Father of Jesus Christ delegated in a certain sense His own rights over His Son. St. Joseph exercised paternal supervision over the Son of Eternal Glory. For the Lord of life and death to humble Himself in humility and obedience before one of His creatures, even though she were the most perfect, is still an unspeakable wonder. Yet with regard to Mary we can more easily realize this humility, from the fact that He had chosen her to be His Mother in the most real and

complete sense. But in order to be obedient unto death, He wished to also practise obedience and complete submission towards a creature to whom He was not bound by the sacred bonds of flesh and blood and filial duty. St. Joseph, therefore, was appointed as God's chosen instrument to consume a series of years in acting as an earthly father to Jesus Christ. As St. John Damascene teaches, the Lord entrusted to him the duty of loving the youthful Saviour, of watching over Him, and of commanding Him. He endowed him with the love of a father, in order that the eternal Son during His earthly existence should be attended not only with a mother's tenderness, but also with a father's loving gravity. He endowed him with the vigilance of a father, that he might be ready to assist the divine Son in all emergencies. He entrusted to him the authority of a father, that Jesus might exercise obedience towards him in all his directions and commands. Infinite condescension of God, exalted dignity of St. Joseph!

MODELS OF HOLY WEDLOCK.

In this sacred union between Mary and St. Joseph is contained a rich treasury of truths and instructions for all coming generations.

In the lapse of ages, holy matrimony, though established by God, had been abused to the most atrocious extent and debased to the lowest degree, and the female sex was ground under the twofold curse of passion and slavery. Now that the heavenly Physician had come to heal all the ills of sick humanity, he must necessarily eradicate the very cause of the ills, namely, the disfigurement and debasement of matrimony. A world steeped in sensuality must accept the conviction that the matrimonial union is not founded upon a sensual and fleshly lust, but on spiritual

love, mutual respect and reverence, and mutual support. Now as Mary was appointed to be, for all future generations and for all conditions in life, the most exalted model, it lay in the plan of Divine Providence to set her forth at the very threshold of the new kingdom of grace, as the most exalted model, not only for those living in the holy state of matrimony, but also as a model which all should follow and imitate in a spirit of pure love, if not in virginal continence—as a model of pure morality and of the holy fear of God, especially in time of great peril and unwholesome temptation.

THE CHOICE OF A CHRISTIAN COMPANION.

Mary was now espoused to St. Joseph. No one asked her, nor durst she ask her own heart, whether the chosen spouse (man of the lottery) pleased her. With us, blessed with Christianity, it is one of its advantages that both parties are free to choose and to consent to holy Matrimony. This is indeed a great blessing, as long as the young woman does not permit herself to be blinded by injurious sentiment or unworthy motives, but first tests quietly the qualities of her husband and then takes counsel with persons of experience and with God. The time of this mutual testing between persons contemplating marriage is termed by the world the time of courtship.

Christian young man and young woman, and you, too, parents of such young people, lay it well to heart, courtship has no other object, and indeed can have no other, than to make young people know each other, and become known to each other, in order thus to ascertain whether they are suitable for each other. Such an acquaintance, therefore, ought to be made, only at an age and under such circumstances that a speedy marriage is possible. Courtship of young people just out of school is

an iniquity and most assuredly will lead to debauchery. A courtship running through years is always a proximate occasion of sin and a species of wrongdoing to God; for the heart and its love are stolen from God and thrown away on a man.

There can be few more serious and important subjects brought before the attention of young people than a courtship. Just as you conduct yourself therein, just as you decide, so, too, will you decide your fate for time and eternity. And yet you are prone to look upon and treat courtship as a play. Either through inexperience or through rashness, you trifle with innocence, you play with fire, you trifle with the grace of God, you trifle with your life's happiness, you trifle with heaven and with hell. How is this trifling to end when your own sensuality and the devil, too, are making use of the weapons of allurement and blindness? When, too, the defending arm of conscience, of prayer, of your guardian angel, of modest sentiment, are cast away? Here I do not speak of those gross transgressions often entered on the parish marriage record, whereby the subsequent marriage is only a cloak for previous disgrace, but rather of those inward, unclean impulses of the heart, of certain matters that wound the tenderness of modesty and shun the presence of others. How, under such circumstances, can the necessary tranquillity of heart be preserved, the illuminations from heaven be kept unobscured, in order that you may test and decide? Christian reader, it is in presence of the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in frequent and devout recourse to the Blessed Sacrament, that you will find courage and strength to overpower rising sensuality; there you will find light for these delicate and decisive circumstances.

Christian young man, proceed with gravity and conscientiousness to the task of choosing a companion for life. Do not be influenced by things which, though they may

please you to-day, will vanish in a short time, or of which you will become soon disgusted. Money and comely features are not a guarantee for God's peace and God's blessing. What you should seek is what will be to you a comfort every day of your life, that is, purity of soul, goodness of heart, firm faith, quiet humility, self-denial, and patient suffering; an obliging disposition, a tact to advise, skill in consoling, helping, and discharging household duties, and a mild yet firm character amid the other members of your mutual home.

Christian young woman, I implore you, for the sake of your innocent soul, do not permit yourself to be rashly and inconsiderately drawn into an affection for a young man, for there are many of them who are not bent on the honorable possession of your hand, but rather on your destruction. If you have made the first step, if you have been gradually exposed to the danger of certain importunities, step backward at once, for now you have evidence that the importuner is not thinking of your good, that he does not love your soul, nor your honor, nor your virtue. Never give your consent to any young man who does not discharge the duties he owes to God, or keep the promises made to Him. If he fears not God, nor loves Him, if he is not faithful to God, how can he then respect you, love you, or be true to you? It is not the man that makes you happy, but a true friend and guide, a member of your own faith and a sharer in your piety, a fellow-pilgrim through happiness and tribulation to eternal life. Never, on any consideration, trust your fate to an inebriate. Place no confidence in his promises of amendment; do not flatter yourself that you will later attach him to the domestic hearth. Pray, Christian daughter, pray earnestly, if you would remain steadfast and be happy in the future.

Christian parents, a truly sincere and God-pleasing

solicitude and provision for your grown-up children is the conclusion and the crowning of education. Yet, alas, how often through your neglect or through the unskilful discharge of your duty in this regard, your work is not only bereft of its crown, but is utterly destroyed and undone! In these particular positions in the life of your grown-up child, you have the advantage of experience and of matured judgment. Utilize this advantage for your own comfort and for the welfare of your child. Alas, how often the curse and reproach of an unhappy marriage rebounds upon the parents! How often parents are responsible for the fall of their daughter during courtship! The voice of experience, the voice of conscience, the voice of God, speak to you aloud and in tones of warning, not to allow your daughter to be in a position of danger without your supervision. Do not dispense yourself from this obligation with the delusion that your child may be left to the guidance and dictates of her own conscience. If she is good and innocent, be careful that she remain so. Nor should you dispense yourself from the duty of watching your daughter under the pretence that she would be uselessly annoyed and angry at you. Believe me, when she grows older in life's experience, she will be grateful for your vigilance.

Chaste and God-loving spouses, Mary and Joseph, protect and advise our young men and young women! Lead them to the destiny in life intended for them by God. Enlighten them in their decisions. By your prayers and example effect that every Christian bridal pair may advance to the bridal altar with untarnished souls, in order there to receive the abundant graces of the Almighty God, as imparted by Him in the holy Sacrament of Matrimony.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARY AND JOSEPH IN NAZARETH.

THE FIRST DOMESTIC REGULATIONS.

MARY had inherited the paternal home from her saintly parents. Here she and her chaste spouse decided to take up their abode. With grateful hearts, with the blessing of the priests, and the good wishes of their friends, they repaired to Nazareth, entered the quiet and cherished home that had been the scene of the trials and virtues of St. Joachim and St. Anne, and of the childish happiness and heavenly favors of Mary herself. It was soon to witness still greater wonders.

Do you, too, Christian reader, full of reverence, enter into this humble dwelling as into a temple of God where our merciful Lord is worshipped, and where inexhaustible graces are bestowed. Here the question that concerned this holy couple was not so much how they were to subsist and furnish the house, as how they were to serve God.

At first, a little dispute arose between the two holy persons. As might be expected from their humility, each of these servants of God preferred to obey rather than command in regulating household affairs. St. Joseph hesitated and took the humbler position. But Mary showed him that by a divine ordinance and the law of the land the husband was the head and the master of the house. Only two conditions were laid down, namely, that each one should have free time for prayer, and perfect freedom in almsgiving and other works of piety.

THE FIRST AVOWAL.

The time had now come when the immaculate Virgin must necessarily make known to St. Joseph the delicate secret of her heart—her vow of perpetual virginity. Oh, how gladly, in her humility and timid delicacy, she would have allowed this circumstance to remain a secret between her God and her own soul! By this revelation she would expose to human eyes the wealth and nobility of her soul, and the extent of her favors from heaven. Still she knew that complete uprightness of heart was not only meritorious but indispensable. Moreover, an inner voice assured her that her chaste spouse would gladly consent to her proposition to live together as brother and sister.

When at last she ventured to tell St. Joseph of her vow, and prayed him to be a protector of her promise to God, assuring him at the same time that she would therefore love him the more faithfully, and be united to him the more closely in spirit, since her love would be purer and holier, the saintly man showed no signs of surprise at the circumstance, though till then unknown in Israel. From early youth he himself had loved and cherished holy purity as the fairest among all virtues, and it was now the dearest wish of his heart to preserve this purity till the end of his life. Moreover, as the Blessed Virgin stood imploringly before him, her virgin brow reflecting modesty and holiness, no unbecoming thought could enter his mind at the very sight of this queen of heaven. He felt as if he stood before an angel, and more than an angel.

So this holy couple vowed to each other such mutual love and fidelity as might be promised between a brother and sister. With grateful hearts they renewed together their holy vows of virginity. In the same happy moment

both of their hearts were wonderfully strengthened in purity and inflamed with divine love. St. Joseph, too, was filled with new light by this conversation. He was astonished at the marvellous wisdom, humility, and purity of the Blessed Virgin, whose spouse he had the honor to be.

VIRGINAL WEDLOCK.

What a glorious spectacle for God and the angels was this heavenly life of the chaste couple! What a sublime and grave example for all Christian married people! This example is to-day, and has been during all ages, so powerful in its effects, that at all times there have been God-fearing married couples who have suppressed all sensuality, or else triumphed over it to such a degree as to cheerfully forego the marriage rights and to serve the Lord in virginal love. Not only in the cottages of the poor, but also in the palaces of kings, has this glorious example of the carpenter of Nazareth found zealous imitators. Recall to mind, Christian reader, the sublime continency of the holy emperor, Henry II., whose saint's day falls on the 13th of July. He lived with his queen, St. Cunigunda, in a state of sacred virginity, so that, in his last sickness, just a few hours before his death, he could say to her relatives: "I received her a virgin, I leave her a virgin." In fact, this St. Cunigunda is honored as a virgin in the holy office of the Church. In the same state of virginity lived King Coloman, of Gallicia, with his wife, Salome, of Poland; also Duke Boleslas, of Poland, surnamed the Chaste, with Ringa, the niece of St. Elizabeth. Such pure married lives practised in honor of the spouse of the Blessed Virgin are termed "Joseph marriages." May these heavenly angelic sentiments not entirely disappear from Christian married life!

May such continue, in order to be an atonement for excessive sensuality and for the abasement of that holy state which has been raised by Jesus Christ to the dignity of a sacrament.

Certainly, a vow involving the most serious consequences is easily made in a moment of pious enthusiasm. But to keep that vow forever and amid adverse circumstances is no easy duty; for the tempter from hell will assail what is holiest in the holiest of persons. But continued vigilance, ardent prayer, humble confidence in God's assistance tend to overcome the danger, and, even with the help of self-control, to accumulate merit. How much more then in the case of the Blessed Virgin who, by reason of being conceived without sin, was exempt from the concupiscence that besets all other children of Adam.

SANCTITY OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE.

Christian married people, the chief means whereby you are to maintain enduring chastity are vigilance, prayer, and confidence in God. Alas! grave and countless are the evils beneath which mankind is groaning at the present time. But nothing is more blighting, no vice calls down such dreadful maledictions on human society, no evil brings on society such lasting destruction, as the un-Christianizing and secularizing of the Sacrament of Matrimony. When this fountain of society's life is turbid, where shall any man drink in a healthy life? May all those whose exalted duty it is to preserve order, morality, and right exert themselves to guard and defend the freedom of the Church and the sacramental character of this holy union. Alas, how much to be pitied are those persons who first would strip this daughter of heaven of her garment of grace, and in the contract of marriage

pretend to discover only a civil contract,* which they dare to enter upon without God, without priest, without blessing! What a poor pledge is here given for a faithful discharge of duty, for heaven's benediction during the whole long, serious, thorn-strewn journey of life! Yet the powers of this world cannot succeed in disowning the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage, nor can the enactments from the law books go far in nullifying on this point the laws of God and His Church, if you, Christian parents, only fulfil faithfully, by vigilance, prayer, and trust in God, the duties of your holy state: if you set your faces against all the enticements to unrestraint, and, at the marriage of your sons and daughters, demand firmly the conditions required by conscience, morality, and the holy Catholic Church.

Purest Virgin Mary, purest spouse of St. Joseph, you can by your noble example and by your powerful intercession so arrange things, that Christian young men and women may enter on holy Matrimony pure and fearing God. You can also hold them conscientiously to these sentiments, and prevent them from descending to any abuse of this union, either by excessive sensuality or unhappy infidelity.

You know the dangers to which the Christian character of the family is exposed. You know how the tender and innocent children, even under the roof of their father's

* The so-called civil marriage, that is, a marriage contracted before the civil authorities. It is hardly necessary to remark, that a practical Catholic, where a civil ceremony is required by law, cannot be satisfied with this, but must go before the priest to receive the blessing of the Church, and this should be done before the civil ceremony wherever possible. When this is not done the marriage is sinful, and in places where the decrees of the Council of Trent have been promulgated, it is null and void, and to be considered as a concubinage. It is also self-evident that a valid marriage cannot be dissolved by the sentence of a civil judge.

house, are exposed to great dangers. Saintly protectors of our homes, St. Joseph and Mary, permit that the merits of your pure domestic life may bring down upon us the richest blessings.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS INWARDLY PREPARED FOR THE MESSIAS.

ONCE more glancing backward, Christian reader, at the wondrous dispensations of God with regard to the Blessed Virgin, you see her led on step by step, and nearer and nearer, to her grand and noble destiny. These outward preparations are now complete. Mary is now matured in years and in virtue. In the eyes of the world she is a married woman. The Son of God may now be born into the world as the putative Son of Mary and Joseph. But to this external preparation of the Mother there is yet to be added still further internal preparations becoming and proportionate to the approaching mystery of the Incarnation. It is necessary that she should be endowed with a deeper knowledge of the plan of Redemption. Great events of the world are usually preceded by premonitory signs, and ordinary observers can be in some measure prepared for them. Thus, in the Old Testament, the people, relying upon the many signs and prophecies that were given them, held the expectation and cherished the hope of seeing the time of which we are now speaking, when the "Desired of Nations" was about to come. But in the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary this conviction must be made specially clear and vivid. This was effected by her profound

understanding of the Scriptures, by her great yet tender affection for everything pertaining to God, by her uninterrupted communings through prayer with heaven, and by clear and copious revelations that were made to her.

UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES.

The wonderful Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ is an unfathomable mystery even for us who walk in the full bright light of revelation. Far more so was it, then, to those who lived before the event itself. In order, therefore, to afford to the predestined Mother of God a due comprehension of the Incarnation of the Son of God, and of her own part in the mystery, and thus to enable her to pronounce more fully and intelligently the momentous word of her concurrence with the will of God namely, "Be it done unto me according to Thy word" [*fiat*], it was necessary that God should reveal to her in a very special manner a series of profound truths which Christ Himself afterwards made known to all men.

The first of these truths to be made known to Mary was the mystery of the Most Adorable Trinity. For many very grave reasons the God of Israel had not revealed Himself to the people as a God subsisting in Three Divine Persons. As a safeguard against the polytheism of the heathens He had revealed Himself simply as one God. Hardly any one of the prophets had the slightest perception of the triune nature of God. But now, when the Second Person of these Three Divine Persons was about to become man through the operation of another Person, namely, the Holy Ghost, it is clear that Mary, who was to be the Mother, should necessarily possess a knowledge of this profound mystery of the Trinity.

Moreover, it was necessary that the Mother of the Redeemer should be afforded still further light on the

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necessity of the Redemption and on its various effects. She should know such truths as the following: The value of a human soul, which is the image and likeness of the Most High; its original state of justice; the deplorable results of our first parents' transgression; the enormity of an offence against God; the inability of man, by or in himself, to effect a reconciliation with God, or to atone for the original Fall, or to save himself from error. These are some of the sublime truths which render possible a fair comprehension of the work of the Redemption. We may well suppose that these were revealed to Mary in a mysterious mode of revelation and vision.

If to you, Christian reader, the wonderful phases of the higher mystical life are not entirely unknown, and if you recall the sublime revelations enjoyed by so many saints, by St. Gertrude, St. Matilda, and, in later times, by the Blessed Catharine Emmerich, you will not wonder that to the Queen of all the saints were revealed and imparted similar and still greater and profounder and more mysterious communications concerning the mysteries of heaven. Indeed they were intended as a preparation for her own divine maternity.

LONGING FOR THE REDEEMER.

A still further and extraordinary preparatory result was produced by grace on the heart and will of the Blessed Virgin. This was an unspeakable longing for the salvation of mankind.

Christian reader, in order to understand, at least partly, Mary's longings in this respect, consider the yearnings of the just people of the Old Testament for the coming of the Redeemer. When, with tearful eyes, they looked out upon the ocean of iniquity and desolation that had submerged and well-nigh destroyed the whole human family; when they heard the shrieks of the slave under the lash,

the moans of debased woman, the wailings of children strangled by the hands of their own fathers, the groanings of suicides driven to death by despair; when, in connection with all this, they remembered the many promises of a divinely sent Saviour, and the future glory of the new kingdom of God on earth, how their hearts must have burned with a holy, ardent longing for that promised Redeemer! "Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens," they cried out in holy enthusiasm, "and wouldst come down! The mountains would melt away at Thy presence. They would melt as at the burning of fire, the waters would burn with fire, that Thy name might be made known to Thy enemies, that the nations might tremble at Thy presence." (Is. lxiv. 1, 2.)

Consider also the longings of the just souls in limbo. On earth, these holy persons had faithfully served the Lord and had died in a state of grace. But as heaven was closed, they remained imprisoned in a place, where, by the hope of a Redeemer to come, they were sustained, and, suffering no positive sensible pain, they longed and sighed for the moment of their liberation. As the prisoner in his dark cell listens near the door, and strains his ears in unceasing efforts to hear the distant footsteps of his liberator, and the rattling of the keys in his hands, so did these poor souls wait and sigh and listen, century after century. As years rolled by, as the numbers of prisoners increased, their cries and yearnings grew more eager and exacting, and more moving. "How long, O Lord, wilt Thou be angry forever: shalt Thy zeal be kindled like a fire? Remember not our former iniquities, let Thy mercy speedily prevent us: for we are become exceeding poor. Help us, O God, our Saviour: and for the glory of Thy name, O Lord, deliver us. And let Him be made known among the nations before our eyes." (Ps. lxxviii.)

Consider finally, Christian reader, the longings of the angels for the restoration of mankind. These loving friends of man beheld the frightful spiritual needs of those dwelling on the earth and they heard the lamentations of the dead children of God. Their compassion was so aroused by these miseries, that, were it possible for angels, they would have suffered from mere sympathy and their happiness would have been interrupted. With alarm they witnessed the despotic dominion exercised by the spirit of darkness over the hearts of men ever since the days of Adam. They saw hell filling up with damned souls while the halls of heaven were deserted. Oh! how they longed for the moment when they would be permitted to wing their joyful way to earth and to limbo, and to proclaim to the sufferers in both places the joyful message; "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: for this day is born to you a Saviour who is Christ the Lord." (Luke ii. 10.)

Perhaps now, Christian reader, you may be better able to understand and appreciate the longing that dwelt quietly, though deeply and powerfully, in the highly illuminated and grace-laden soul of the Mother of God. Is it too much to say that greater and more powerful than the longings of all the saints of the Old Testament, as well of all the choirs of angels, for the coming of the Redeemer and the salvation of men, was the fervid and deep-seated desire that reigned in Mary's heart for the salvation of her fellow-beings. Indeed, there are many pious and learned writers who maintain that the heavenly Father hastened the time for the Incarnation of His divine Son in order to still this ardent longing of the Blessed Virgin. We read, too, in the lives of several saints that Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar sometimes left the tabernacle in the consecrated Host and most miraculously united Himself to these servants of

God in holy communion, because their languishing souls longed for this heavenly food and the time or the circumstances were not favorable to the ordinary mode of receiving communion. Would not God work a similar miracle out of love for His chosen Mother? He had already wrought a still more peculiar and extraordinary wonder when He selected her to be His Mother. Moreover, it is self-evident that this longing on the part of Mary for the Incarnation of Jesus Christ was entirely inseparable from the honorable and honored co-operation in this mystery, to which she had been chosen. Her longings were for a Saviour, for the glory of God, and for the salvation of souls, and not for her own motherhood, in so far as this was to be for her a shining glory.

REVELATIONS TO ST. JOSEPH.—HIS INNER LIFE OF GRACE.

From the hour in which St. Joseph took up his abode in the humble home of the Blessed Virgin at Nazareth, his soul increased in charity and sanctity. The two hearts of these holy servants of God were in perfect harmony in all things, but especially in their mutual sentiments of piety and devotion to God. In holy conversation, all the rich knowledge of the Holy Scriptures were communicated from Mary's well-stored brain into St. Joseph's heart. Moreover, the divine grace of heaven operated in St. Joseph's soul according to his vast merits and proportionate to his sublime share in the glorious Incarnation and Redemption. And how rich his merits were! How sublime the position assigned to him by heaven in these grand mysteries, especially in Jesus Christ's becoming man! As in his youth, the eye of heaven had watched over him, and as its grace had, from earliest years, strengthened him, so as to fit him to become a worthy spouse of God's chosen Mother, so now

did that same grace continue its work in his soul, that he might be still further fitted to assume the exalted and responsible duties of foster-father and protector to the Son of the living God. Indeed, the severe and trying tests that were yet in store for him could not be permitted to break suddenly upon him, until the necessary fortitude and the gradual faith-strengthening had been first well established by the intervention of divine grace, mingled with his own individual co-operation. But, as in the case of the Blessed Virgin, the preparatory workings of grace in the soul of St. Joseph had a bearing rather on his knowledge of the necessity of the Redemption, and of God's mercies therein revealed, than on his share itself in the work of Redemption. Humility, distrust of one's self is ever and chiefly the ground from which heaven's fairest flowers spring forth.

ADVENT.

What a reproach, Christian reader, to our cold and sluggish souls is the holy ardor of the Blessed Virgin! Not merely once in our lifetime, but with each returning year, do we commemorate with holy Church the mystery of Christ becoming man. We should, then, in the spirit of the Church, prepare ourselves for this great mystery by an impatient longing and by good works of piety during the season of Advent. Alas, with what icy heartlessness we pass through these days of grace on our way to a fruitless celebration of Christmas! Nay, more, either of our own free will, or out of custom, or because it is the wish of the Church, we approach the table of the Lord more than once a year. There awaits us the same "Desired of Nations," eager to descend into our souls as He descended of old into the virginal bosom of Mary. A preparation similar to hers, and, if possible, a more deep-

seated preparation ought we to make for this special and glorious advent into our souls of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Then, indeed, would our souls lose themselves in longings and holy desires. Then we would, with our whole heart and soul, with all our mind, and all our strength, cry aloud to Our Lord on the altar: "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts. My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God; for better is one day in Thy courts above thousands. For God loveth mercy and truth; the Lord will give grace and glory." (Ps. lxxxiii.)

"As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters: so my soul panteth after Thee, O God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God: when shall I come and appear before the face of God? My tears have been my bread day and night: whilst it is said to me daily: Where is thy God? These things I remembered, and poured out my soul in me: for I shall go over into the place of the wonderful tabernacle, even to the house of God. With the voice of joy and praise: the noise of one feasting." (Ps. xlviii. 1–5.)

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN SALUTED BY GOD THROUGH THE ANGEL GABRIEL.

"KNOWING the season, that it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep. For now our salvation is nearer than when we believed. The night is past and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light." Thus

speaketh St. Paul in the 13th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans.

Yes, Christian reader, let us awake from our sleep of slothfulness, let us abandon the works and the ways of sin, let us take in our hands the weapons of light, which are a firm faith, a deep humility, and an ardent, grateful love, in order to contemplate worthily and profitably the great and stupendous mysteries of approaching Redemption.

HEAVEN'S MESSENGER.

Mary, the future temple of the Adorable Trinity, shone forth in all her beauteous lustre. On the altar of her heart burned higher and brighter the fires of her ardor. The long desired and expected hour had come when the glory of the Most High was to fill this temple and descend upon this altar. With holy reverence and joyous heart, receive, Christian reader, the happy tidings as related to us by St. Luke the Evangelist: "And in the sixth month [after St. Elizabeth had conceived her son, the future St. John the Baptist] the Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail full of grace: the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." (Luke i. 26–28.)

This "day which the Lord hath made" in order to begin the salvation of men, was the 25th day of March, about 742 years after the foundation of Rome. The Angel Gabriel was sent from God to Nazareth. Nazareth was a small secluded town of an unimportant province, the days of whose historical importance were over, whose national independence had been lost, and whose capital,

the city of Jerusalem, was now chafing silently and sullenly under the iron heel of foreign despotism. Even in this prostrate land, the very name Nazareth was a by-word and a reproach. In this same despised Nazareth, there stood a humble house, the dwelling of poverty, whose simple inmates, a carpenter with his espoused wife earned their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, The messenger, however, was one of the highest princes of heaven, Gabriel, the "Strength of God," and whom we rightly call the Angel of the Incarnation. Listen, Christian reader, to the profound words of St. Thomas, "the Angel of the Schools": "In all ages it was deemed an extraordinary occurrence for an angel to appear to men. It was considered a great favor for men to have an opportunity of manifesting their reverence for an angel, and a man so favored enjoyed fame among his people. But for an angel to show respect and reverence for a child of earth was a thing unheard till the time when the Angel Gabriel saluted the Blessed Virgin and said to her reverentially: 'Hail!' It is becoming that man should show deference to an angel, but not that an angel should show deference to man; for the angel is man's superior under three points of view. First, in point of dignity, for the angel is spiritual by nature, man corporal. Secondly, in the matter of familiar nearness to God, for the angel being as it were an inmate of heaven, stands near the throne of God, while man is banished far away from God on account of sin. In the third place, the angel stands far above man in his enjoyment of divine favors; for, being in heaven, he receives in the highest intensity the very light of God's countenance; while men, even if they do enjoy the light of divine grace, have, nevertheless, only a measured and limited supply. Now, as in the annunciation of the Incarnation, the child of earth does not do reverence to the angel, while he renders

homage to her, it follows that Mary surpasses the angels in these three respects: in dignity, in confidential familiarity with God, and in the splendor and fulness of divine grace." (*Opus.* 8.)

If, then, Christian reader, a prince of heaven pays homage to our beloved protectress, even while she sojourns, a mortal, here below, how much more are we, sinful men, justified and bound to honor her and glorify her name, now that she is gloriously crowned in heaven as Queen of the world!

THE GREETING FROM THE MOST HIGH.

What is the import of this angelical salutation? Ponder well and carefully, Christian reader, and with reverent attention, the well-known words of the first part of your familiar "Hail Mary."

"*Ave!*" "Hail!" "I salute thee." A salute from the most high God! What a condescension on the part of God! What an honor for the humble child of earth! What a pleasure for the angel! And, more than all, what a consolation for man! Since the unhappy fall of our first parents in Paradise, man stood, in relation to his God, in the light of an enemy. The original and confidential intercourse was broken off. Here, the outraged majesty of an offended God paves the way for a meeting of reconciliation; for He proffers to a member of the human family, through a special messenger, a salutation —*Ave*, or Hail.

Therefore, Christian reader, this Hail Mary, pronounced by an angel well-nigh two thousand years ago, in the simple home at Nazareth, burst through the four walls of the house, and became a glorious anthem to be sung by men and angels for all eternity. "Hail Mary!" "*Ave Maria!*" When the child begins to speak, its pious

mother hastens to teach it the words, "Hail Mary!" The child grows in grace and strength, and of its own accord says every day, "Hail Mary!" In joy or in sorrow, the Christian breast breathes forth the grateful prayer and cries for help, saying, "Hail Mary!" Three times each day, the tongues of bells in lofty towers, like angels' voices in the air, peal forth "Hail Mary, *Ave Maria*," and at their call the farmer stops his work, the mechanic drops his tools, the scholar shuts his book, the sick forget their pains, the sailor on the sea, and the shepherd in the field, and the hunter on the mountain side, the whole Catholic world, cry out: "Hail Mary!"

Christian reader, whenever you pronounce this beautiful greeting of the angel, let it be with a devotion, reverence, and sincerity similar to that with which the Angel Gabriel addressed it to the Blessed Virgin.

FULL OF GRACE.

"*Gratia plena*—Full of Grace!" We often admire the fulness of grace bestowed upon the most distinguished saints. In our eyes, indeed, they may have been full of grace. But only He to whose eyes all things are plainly visible, He who will sit in judgment on the most just, knows perfectly. But Mary was praised as being full of grace by the Giver of grace Himself. If her pure soul had needed, or been able to bear, a still greater abundance of grace, God would have bestowed it upon her before in His eternal truth He would have pronounced her full of grace. Moreover, this fulness of grace, Christian reader, was awarded to her, as you must have perceived, before the coming of that Holy Spirit, through whose mysterious operation the Son of God took up His abode in her chaste womb. She was thus full of grace, not only during the time that she was united with the divine Giver

of grace, but even before that time. "Who hath measured the height of heaven and the breadth of the earth, and the depth of the abyss?" (Ecclus. i. 2.) And if any mortal could measure these, he would still be unable to measure the height and the breadth and the depth of the wealth of grace buried in the heart of the Mother of God.

The height of grace!—Sanctifying grace! Recall, Christian reader, what we read on page 81 about operations of grace in the Sacrament of Baptism. As the light of the sun brightens and illuminates the costly diamond, until it fairly sparkles in brilliant beauty, so, by virtue of this admirable sacrament, does a flood of supernatural brightness deluge our souls to such a degree that they become pleasing to God and acquire a right to a child's inheritance of heaven. All this light and brilliancy of soul are still more intensified in and by all the works of piety we perform, but first and above all by the close and intimate union that occurs between us and Our Saviour Jesus Christ in holy communion. Mary from the first moment of her existence was like the purest diamond in the eyes of God, by virtue of her immaculate conception. By her personal active co-operation, by her unceasing prayer, by her union with God and her deeds of self-denial, this first free-will gift of God was so increased and intensified, that now she may be styled full of grace, on account of her personal merits.

The breadth of grace—efficient actual grace. While sanctifying grace is an enduring condition of the soul, we understand by actual, operating grace a passing supernatural help from God, given to enable us to discharge our duty in special cases, to accomplish successfully and meritoriously all works undertaken by our own free will. Regarding this necessity of ours for divine assistance, and natural inability to lead a meritorious life and one pleasing to God, the divine Giver of all grace says: "Without Me you

can do nothing." (John xv. 5.) As the sun ceases not to pour forth upon the earth its vivifying and fructifying rays, thus forcing the growth and producing the bloom and effecting the fruitfulness of the plant, so there exists an unbroken blessed intercourse between God and every soul that is in a state of sanctifying grace.

Consider, Christian soul, those sublime sentiments and real virtues that exist in the interior spiritual life of chosen souls; namely, that firm faith, that childlike confidence in God, that ardent love, that purity of intention, that zeal and that humility in all their actions. Yet what are these saints and their sublime qualities when compared to the Virgin full of grace!

The depth of grace, or the fulness of grace for the benefit and salvation of our fellow-beings (*charismata*). No human career was ever so clearly destined for the benefit of men as was Mary's life. Every man who has an appointment from God to discharge a special mission for the benefit of his fellow-men is always fitted by God in a way becoming a messenger from God.

Thus the prophets of the Old Testament announced their divine mission amid the working of miracles, while with the eye of a seer they peered into remote futurity. Thus the apostles, together with the power of miracles, possessed the gift of tongues and a personal infallibility in matters of faith. All their words and works were attended with marvellous results. Thus, after the first sermon preached by St. Peter on Whitsunday, three thousand Jews were converted and demanded Baptism. (Acts ii. 41.) Therefore, Christian reader, what ought to be expected from the very Queen of prophets and apostles? Her gift of prophecy she displays in a glorious manner in her hymn of "The Magnificat." During the course of ages, her miracles have been so frequent and multiplied, that it might be said the Almighty God works no miracle

on earth except through Mary. Her treasury of graces for bestowal on others is so inexhaustible, that till the end of time she can supply from it, to all who are in need, help, consolation, light, and salvation. Being the treasuress of heavenly goods, she has power to bestow the graces earned by the merits of her own divine Son, and of all the saints. St. Thomas says: "If a saint possessed so many graces that they would suffice for the salvation of all the men in the world, this would be the highest grace of all. Now this is the case, first of all, of course, with Jesus, but also with Mary. In every danger, you may obtain security from the Blessed Virgin. You can also have her with you, to help you in every work of virtue. She is thus full of grace, and surpasseth all the angels in this fulness.

BLESSED AMONG WOMEN.—DOMINUS TECUM BENEDICTA TU IN MULIERIBUS.

"The Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women." The Lord is with thee! Holy Scripture informs us that the infinitely sublime God, in His love for man, used to walk in the cool of the evening under the trees of Paradise (Gen. iii. 8). Sacred, blessed nearness to and familiarity with God! Enviable pair with whom the Lord was present. Now as the ever-blessed Virgin, conceived without the stain of original sin, had done nothing to keep the Holy Spirit from her, He was always with her, for it is ever His delight to walk with the children of men (Prov. viii. 31). Not in this remote way only was the Lord with Mary; He was and is immediately with her. From all eternity, the Lord was with Mary; because, from all eternity she had been chosen and contemplated in the counsels and decrees of God as the future Mother of the Redeemer (see chapter ii.).

Now, as in the existence of God there is no time and no succession of events, Mary in a certain sense was adorned from all eternity with the sublime prerogatives of Mother of God. Thus from all eternity was the eternal Father with her as with His beloved daughter. From all eternity, was the Son with her, as with His most cherished Mother. From all eternity was the Holy Ghost with her, as with his chaste spouse.

This intimate union has never been dissolved. It can never be dissolved, nor even disturbed, for Mary, on her part, was always with the Lord, never departing, by a finger's breadth from Him, through the slightest unfaithfulness. Always, too, she was with God the Son. Like a fond and faithful mother, she accompanied Him along the thorny path of life. Even on Calvary's height, she was with Him. And now in heaven, the Lord is with her, and she is with her Lord. She is enthroned as Queen of heaven, she presides over the treasury of grace; and, so to speak, over the omnipotence of God. There for all eternity is she to be praised and loved, and on earth men shall praise and love her till the end of time.

BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN.

Christian reader, contemplate that train of pious and heroic women who in ante-Christian times were the sublime prototypes of the Virgin of Nazareth. (See page 32.) As the sun surpasses the stars, as the cedars of Libanus overtop the undergrowth of the forest, so does Mary tower above all of her race. She unites in herself all perfections, all virtues peculiar to every circumstance in life; for she is the spotless virgin, the chaste spouse of St. Joseph, the most worthy mother, the most retiring widow. As the most perfect model for all of her sex, Mary is blessed among women.

By a woman did sin and death enter into the world. By a woman, too, was salvation to be brought back. And this chosen woman was exempted from the consequences, from the cause of sin, that dismal inheritance of mankind. She remained free from all the disgraces and all the weaknesses to which all others of her sex were subjected. This one woman it was, who was chosen from among all the daughters of men to be the Mother of God, full of grace and consolation for men. She united in her own person virginity and maternity. In a word, this woman was Mary, who was blessed among women.

O clement, O sweet Virgin Mary! I, too, as thy poor servant and sincere admirer, would fain salute thee, but as of myself I could not hope to be able to salute thee in a becoming manner, I join in the salutation of the Archangel Gabriel. I salute thee with his sentiments of charity and of veneration; and at the same time with all the love and veneration with which this angelic greeting has been tendered to thee throughout all ages and in all places, both in heaven and on earth, by thy admiring saints, and as it will be both in time and eternity.

At every moment of my life do I wish to tender to thee this greeting, this salutation, this homage, and to renew it and offer it again and again. More especially would I wish to thus salute thee in the hour of my death. And lest I should not, in that solemn hour, be able to offer thee such salutation, I do it now by anticipation. With the Archangel Gabriel, I now salute thee as reverently as thou deservest and I am able, saying: "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women."

CHAPTER XX.

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE.

IF the holy archangel had but saluted the spouse of St. Joseph in the name of the Most High and then vanished, even this would be something really wonderful and unheard of. But the greeting was only an introduction to the most important question that ever occurred between earth and heaven.

THE HAPPY MESSAGE.

Hear, Christian reader, and ponder well and with deep veneration, the other portion of the angel's message.

"And the Angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God: Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS; He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father: and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end. And Mary said to the Angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man? And the Angel answering said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God. And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren: because no word shall be impossible with God." (Luke i. 30–37.)

How can it be possible, Christian reader, for me to communicate to you the wealth of sublime truth contained in those words of the holy gospel? What sublime laudations for the announced motherhood, what glorious promises for the expected Son, are herein contained!

THE FULNESS OF TIME.

Eight hundred years before the miraculous occurrences in the cottage at Nazareth, the inspired Prophet Isaias had foretold: "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel," that is to say, God with us. (Is. vii. 14; see page 29.)

And now the angel says to the Blessed Virgin, "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus, that is, Lord and Saviour." What a remarkable fulfilment of the divine promises!

Christian reader, tarry a moment, in order to give expression, from the bottom of your heart, to your feelings of gratitude for that fatherly goodness of God with which He begins now to fulfil His given promises and to satisfy the longing of suffering humanity, through the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This Son who is to be conceived by the humble handmaid of the Lord shall be called the Son of the most high God.* Thus, the Son of Mary is God. This Son, too, shall at the same time obtain the throne of David His father. As descendant of the house of David, to which Mary belonged, He will be a true man. Jesus Christ, therefore, is God-Man, and as such shall reign in the house of Jacob forever. In adverting to His heirship

* In biblical language "shall be called" is often used for "shall be."

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to the throne of David, the high dignity of the Son of the Virgin is declared to be truly and rightfully a *royal* one; while the reigning in the house of Jacob indicates a churchly, spiritual, priestly reigning (administration). Both together point clearly to and signify an ever-living royal high-priesthood. For it was Jacob who, after he had seen the angels about him, descending and ascending, anointed the typical altar-stone, and won the mysterious battle.

From Jacob, to whom was intrusted the covenant, there came forth in a certain measure a figurative Church, visible by its very nature, one, all-embracing, and holy; and now in the Son of Mary, the same is completed, elevated, and diffused, intended for all places and all ages, to be the Church of the new and everlasting covenant.

"Of His kingdom there shall be no end." Consoling promise! The great kingdom of God on earth, at first planted like a mustard seed in the ground, has sprung up, and spread out slowly but surely, further and further, its proud branches over the earth, so that all men may find shelter in its shade, while the angels of heaven rest within its foliages. What gigantic efforts to root this real tree of knowledge out of the midst of the earthly Paradise have been made by the powers of hell and the malice of men! But the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Why, then, are you fearful, O ye of little faith! To-day, in the past, and in the future, the billows of hatred and of tyranny may dash themselves against the kingdom of Christ; of His kingdom there shall be no end. And when the time shall arrive for the struggling Church on earth, and the suffering Church in purgatory to come to an end, the Church triumphant shall live and reign and rejoice and still be the triumphant Church of Christ for all eternity in heaven, assembled about the

glorified Son of Mary. "Of His kingdom, there shall be no end."

THE OVERSHADOWING OF THE HOLY GHOST.

Ineffable, mysterious, worthy of the profound wisdom of God, will be the process whereby Mary shall conceive the Eternal Word and still remain a virgin. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee." Christian reader, bow down in humility your feeble powers of mind when in presence of this ineffable mystery. Believe firmly and rejoice sincerely that this event has come to pass, though you may not know how it came to pass. Consider, too, the following truth: with the Incarnation of the Eternal Word there began a new creation. This is immediately united with the only pure specimen of the first creation, namely, with Mary immaculate. As of old the Holy Ghost descended on the primitive elements in the first creation, "the Spirit of God moved over the waste of waters;" (Gen. i. 2), so does He now come down again in His creative power, to begin the regeneration of the world by the formation of the humanity of Christ out of the substance of the immaculate virgin. Neither the human nature of the Saviour, nor its union in the womb of the Virgin Mary with the nature and person of "the Word," proceed from the essence of the Holy Ghost. Christ, the second Father of the human family, as far as His human nature was concerned, was formed without any father, though by the creating power of the Holy Ghost, out of the body of the virgin Mother, in order to be born of her, as in the beginning the first mother of the human family was created and formed without a father, from the virginal body of Adam, by the omnipotent hand of God.

Thus, Mary, through the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ, becomes, with respect to God's coming to the world and His continued presence in it, first of all others, and in the most complete sense, the Ark of the Covenant, the throne and the tabernacle of the most high and holy God. Hence it is that the angel describes the mode and process by which the divine nature and person of the Word is united in Mary to human nature as overshadowing. For in a similar manner did the Lord descend upon the typical Ark of the Old Covenant, so did He dwell in Solomon's Temple, so was He enthroned on the wings of the Cherubim above the Ark, as "Schechinah." (3 Kings viii. 10–12.)

Furthermore, it is hardly necessary to remark, that this overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Ghost is by no means to be understood as meaning that in the supernatural conception of Jesus Christ the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity was the exclusive active power. For, according to the teachings of the Church, all external operations of the Godhead are attributable to the Three Divine Persons acting in unison. It is rather this; namely, that the formation of the ever-sacred body of Jesus Christ is ascribed to the Holy Ghost in about the same way as we ascribe the creation to the Father, or attribute the sanctification of men to the Holy Ghost.

This all results from the most important grounds, as must have already appeared clear to you, Christian reader, from what has just been said. To understand still better this sublime mystery consider the following grounds:

(*a*) The chief and foremost element in preparing the Blessed Virgin for the conception of the Son of God was a holy charity. This virtue, which is the opposite of earthly and sensual love, burned like a holy fire in the heart of

this incomparable virgin, and thus operated in her bosom the most stupendous and miraculous effects. Now, as the dispensing or giving of this holy love for God is usually ascribed to the Holy Ghost, it is proper to say: Christ was conceived of the Holy Ghost.

(*b*) In this way, too, is revealed to us the truth in reference to the last motive that impelled God to assume human nature. This was no other than the infinite love and goodness of God. Now the Holy Ghost is really the personal mutual love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father.

(*c*) By this means, too, it is made clear to us that it is an entirely undeserved, gratuitous grace and favor to our human nature to be thus united essentially with the divine nature of "the Word;" for the dispensing of grace is usually ascribed to the Holy Ghost.

(*d*) With the conception of Christ this operation was immediately connected; namely, His human nature was sanctified by entirely miraculous superabundant graces, and by them raised and restored to the natural sonship of God. Now as our adoption by God to the rights of His children is usually ascribed to the Holy Ghost, so to describe that immediate, intimate, wonderful, sacred working with the conception of Christ, it is taught by Holy Scripture as well as by the Church catholic, that Christ was conceived of the Holy Ghost.

Thus, you see, Christian reader, that all deeds and ordinances of God, and all teachings of Holy Church, are ever directed by the greatest wisdom, even though human short-sightedness is disposed to treat them as riddles, or human malice inclined to treat them as human inventions.

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!" (Rom. xii. 33.)

TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH.

The holy Archangel Gabriel gives to the highly favored and highly astonished Virgin, to strengthen his assertions, still another sign. He informs her of the wonderful conception with which St. Elizabeth had been favored in her old age, and when there was no hope, humanly speaking, of an issue according to the laws of nature. Surely, the Almighty God, who through His blessings could send issue to a superannuated, barren woman, could also make a maiden a mother without any detriment to her virginity. For with God there is nothing impossible. Christian reader, understand well and clearly the importance of these words, and impress them deeply on your soul. When you look upon the wonderful ways and works of God, when you consider the sublime mysteries of our holy religion, when you stand astonished at the condescension, love, and patience of God, when all these mysteries present themselves to your mind as an unintelligible problem, then remember the words: "With God, there is nothing impossible." When your path through life is crooked and wearisome, when the wild and blinding storms of passion, sorrow, and misfortune thicken around you, and in their rage toss you hopelessly to and fro, then direct your weary gaze towards heaven. When men can no longer help you, or when their help would be of no avail, God will help you, for with Him there is nothing impossible, that is, it at do not contradict His dignity, His glory, or the salvation of mankind.

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CHAPTER XXI.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN RECEIVES THE GREETING AND THE MESSAGE OF THE ANGEL.

LET us now consider the feelings of the Blessed Virgin herself on hearing the salutation of the angel and receiving his message. What did she say? What was her answer?

Although the books of Holy Scripture contain but a meagre account of the rest of the life of the Blessed Virgin, yet, in the narration of this particular event, we have full details; and even the words are preserved as they were uttered by this chosen servant of God.

Christian reader, these details are full of instruction for you. The words are familiar and dear to you.

THE ALARM.

"Mary having heard the angel, was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this might be." (Luke i. 29.) Mary was troubled. She was troubled, not in and at the presence of the angel, for this was not the first time that the Queen of angels had held converse with these heavenly spirits. She was troubled at the salutation itself. The solemnity of this salutation, the lofty praise bestowed upon her in the greeting, words that, in sense and intention, were incomprehensible to her,—all these things seemed perfectly alarming to the humility of this handmaid of the Lord. This it was that filled Mary's soul with alarm. Hers was not that state of consternation which destroys all presence

of mind; it was that peculiar dread which overtakes even the saints and other persons journeying in the ways of grace when they are in doubt about the will of Providence.

Then she thought upon God's presence over nature and on the import and object of the salutation, wondering whether the whole apparition was a mission from God, or an intrigue of Satan disguised in the form of an angel; whether this salutation could really be intended for her; whether it concerned the present or the future. What a dignified, tranquil demeanor, and how becoming under the circumstances, do we discover in this maid of fifteen summers, the orphan daughter of St. Anne! How different the demeanor of the second Eve from that of the first Eve, when parleying with the tempter beneath the tree in Paradise, and entertaining his proposition and promise, "You shall be as gods." (Gen. iii. 5.) What a sublime example she affords to us who are so much inclined to lend a willing ear to flatterers, and who listen to their exaggerated praise till we lose our better judgment and all power of contradiction! How many a young man has abandoned his plighted acts of faith and his salutary fear of God, because he possessed but little self-knowledge and too little prudence! Or, because he had not the strength to despise the hypocritical laudations of his good qualities, to suspect the false promises made to him by worldlings. But should not a Christian maiden be alarmed when she hears her beauty and virtues praised? If not, then she will soon—alas! too soon—have an opportunity to be alarmed at the abyss opening before her.

REFLECTION.

Although the angel's message at first appeared mysterious and perplexing to the Blessed Virgin, yet, to the

announcement that she was to be the Mother of the Messias, she replied with this leading question, "How shall this come to pass, since I know not man?" This is, Christian reader, the first word that the Holy Scriptures give as coming from the lips of our beloved and venerated Lady. Truly they were worthy of her. In this simple question the whole grand soul of Mary reveals itself, as well as her consecrated virginity, her self-denial, and her strength of faith.

It reveals her consecrated virginity. The most important event that could be presented to the admiration of heaven, earth, and even hell, came suddenly upon this tender virgin in the still retirement of her room. Both courage and presence of mind were required to meet this unusual message. We might, therefore, suppose that the Blessed Virgin had not time, for the moment, to reflect upon herself or her own position. But no, it is not the honor thus suddenly conferred upon her by God Himself that occupies her thoughts. She lives so entirely and exclusively in the tender and secret treasure of her heart, in her consecrated purity, that it is constantly before the eyes of her soul, and acts as the measuring-rod and criterion in all the vicissitudes of her life. Hence, there arises at once from the depths of her soul, this reflection, Can this proposition be reconciled with my vow? Thus she confesses her vow to the angels, at the same time renewing it in the most solemn and sacred moment of her life. Christian young woman, look upon this bright example, whenever, by proposal, occasion, or danger, the greatest treasure of your heart is concerned. Do not wait to think on what is said to you, nor to survey the circumstances, but ask at once, How can this come to pass without injury to my innocence?

It shows forth Mary's self-denial. Unspeakably great was the Blessed Virgin's longing for the coming of the

Redeemer; great, too, was her just appreciation of those graces that were bound up with her divine maternity; great and glowing was her love for the Saviour; so great, that it was only by the most intimate union with Him her longing heart could be satisfied. Infinitely great things, therefore, were offered to her by the angel. On the other hand, she remembered a certain promise of hers made to the Lord in her tender youth. But was not this vow made thoughtlessly in the enthusiasm of youth? Can it not be set aside, is it not really annulled by the proposition now made to her by God? Thus stood Mary between the motherhood of the Redeemer and her vow of virginity. But this heroic maiden does not hesitate a moment. She has decided. In the secret recesses of her heart she whispers: "I will pay my vows to the Lord in the sight of all His people: in the courts of the house of the Lord, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem." (Ps. cxv. 18, 19.) But to the angel she spoke aloud, saying, "How shall this come to pass since I know not man?" It is the same as if she said, it must be on condition, in the first place, that she would remain in the fullest and most perfect sense a virgin; that she would forego the honor of being the Mother of God and Queen of angels, if such honor could not be won consistently with her vow of virginity. Christian reader, what firmness of character, what a sublime spirit of sacrifice, are here displayed by a maiden otherwise so timid and retiring! And, alas, on the contrary, what lamentable cowardice is often manifested by Christian young women, who, for the sake of a pretended settlement in life, or for the Judas kiss of a brazen flatterer, lay at the feet of their deceivers the garland of virginal honor and virtue, and the precious jewel of a quiet conscience!

These words reveal Mary's strength of faith. Mary knew the prophecy, that a virgin would conceive.

Hence, she believed without hesitation all that the messenger from heaven mentioned to her. But she did not know how it could come to pass with respect to her vow. New and incomprehensible as was the mystery of the Incarnation, immensely profound as was the angel's promise, incalculable as was the extent, and immeasurable as was the range of the promised wonder-work, many as were the problems and apparent contradictions, opposed as it all might be to human reason, yet Mary had no hesitation in believing the truth. Hence she deserves to hear, not alone from the lips of St. Elizabeth, but also from the tongues of all men in all ages, the words, "Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished, that were spoken to thee by the Lord." (Luke i. 45.)

O firmly believing, profoundly believing Virgin, see how in many places, how in many minds and hearts, all firmness of belief in the truths and promises of God is dead and buried, or at least is beginning to decay. What is to become of our immortal souls, if faith which is the light of our life shall cease to shine? Dispel, then, all the dangers that threaten our holy faith. Implant it in our hearts, make it more and more firm and enduring, that thus Thy beloved Son, Our Lord and Saviour, may be better known and more and more loved.

THE CONSENT.

The angel has given the necessary explanation. Mary's scruples are dispelled. We dare not doubt but that she was entirely free in her decision. O God, what does not depend upon Mary's *yes* or *no*, on the decision of this spouse of the carpenter of Nazareth. Throughout all ages of human history there was never a single moment so decisive, so universally important, so widely embracing as this.

It would seem to us that at this moment all the angels in the heavenly court, were looking in breathless expectation down upon this simple maiden : as if all the tears and prayers of the whole world, and the longings of all hearts for a Redeemer, were so many eloquent voices imploring Mary to say, Yes. It seems as if the patriarchs and prophets and the just men and women of the Old Testament were stretching forth their eager arms from Limbo, and with anxious ears and throbbing hearts were imploring her to let them hear an affirmative answer to the angel's message.

Now, Christian reader, collect your thoughts and your strength, in order to pronounce with becoming reverence the ever-memorable answer of the Blessed Virgin: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word."

Christian reader, ask yourself, or inquire from the most learned among men, whether it were possible to find a shorter, more beautiful, more pronounced, or more characteristic answer under the circumstances than this one that came forth from Mary's pure soul. This answer is a very mirror of brightness, in which the humility, the obedience, the fortitude of the Blessed Virgin are reflected with lustrous splendor.

MARY'S HUMILITY.

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord!" Precisely in the moment when she is raised above all the angels, when she is made the Mother of the eternal Son of the living God, when she is in the act of receiving the highest of well-merited laudations, she proclaims herself a handmaid of the Lord. What unspeakable humility!

Permit me, Christian reader, to say here a comforting and encouraging word for all those who by reason of their

condition in human society, or by their calling in life, are termed handmaids or servants. Very often do such persons become dissatisfied, discontented with their situation in life, and they would fain expostulate with God for having placed them in their unhappy condition. Who are discontented? All those who see in their condition nothing more than a way of earning a living, and who, in the struggle for bread and pursuit of money and pleasure, place the whole object of their existence, and their sole gratification. How can such poor souls be otherwise than discontented! No wonder they should fasten their greedy eyes on the riches, banquets, and pleasures of the fortunate ones of this life. Those, however, who are pious, and actuated by the sacred principles of their holy faith, who are sustained by the grace-life of the Church, and by the powerful examples of the saints—such favored souls will know how to make a virtue of a necessity. They will be servants not only of men, but servants of Jesus Christ. In quiet humility they will walk contentedly the ways of God. Along their hard and self-sacrificing journey they will fix a steady gaze on Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, and on the Son of God, "who emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in the habit formed as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death." (Phil. ii. 7.)

Happy the servant who grasps as an unfailing support the aids held out to him by the Church, in order to carry himself upright in his laborious calling, and who uses them as means to earn for himself a crown of glory in heaven. But masters also are earnestly warned by the handmaid of the Lord to treat their subordinates with parental love and indulgence, not to use them as mere labor-machines, but to have a due solicitude for their souls; for they will one day have to render an account

for the time these servants passed under their roofs. Employers should not forget that in Jesus and Mary all men are brethren.

OBEDIENCE.

Mary does not say, I accept the proposal, I agree to the proposition, or other similar words. No. She says, "Be it done according to Thy word." It was not her own choice, nor her own decision, but a free-will, a full and complete surrender to the will of God that the proposal of the angel found in Mary's soul and should be here expressed. What a source of consolation lay buried in this fiat, this "be it done" of Mary's, for the subsequent sorrowful and afflicted stages of her whole life! It contained the tranquillizing assurance that He, whose will she was doing then, would bestow upon her the strength to do it at all times. Christian reader, cast your eye over all the works that have been done within the pale of the Church, during all ages, for the glory of God and the blessing of men. Only those that have been begun in obedience, led forward in obedience, and sustained in obedience, are really great, or have become successful, enduring, and blessed by God. So, in the motherhood of Mary and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the blessing of obedience should not be wanting on the part of Mary; just as the Son Himself became obedient even unto the death of the cross. Rejoice then, Christian reader, if it is your happy lot to walk upon the safe path of holy obedience. Avail yourself of every opportunity to subject your own will to the will of others.

FORTITUDE IN SUFFERING.

Although Mary's consent was free, yet, free as it was, she was clearly convinced and perfectly conscious of the

responsibility, the obligation, the duties involved in that consent, and which she now took upon herself. Great are the duties and tearful the days of a mother who has to raise up her son, who is also her God, to be sacrificed on the cross. Mary thus assumes the dignity, and she resolves thereby to conceive a Son, to give Him birth, to nourish Him, to raise Him up for martyrdom, for the ignominy of the passion, for the death of the cross.

While the tender Virgin courageously pronounced the fiat, "be it done," she fixed her eye on Golgotha in the distant future, and on its towering cross. Her fiat was not alone for the stable at Bethlehem, but also for the new grave in the garden.

The angel offered her the dignity of being the Mother of God, but he also presented her with a seven-edged sword. Here, too, she pronounced her fiat.

Mary in giving her consent, became not only a Mother for Jesus, but a Mother of grace for men. She agrees to become for all time the Refuge of sinners, the Health of the sick, the intercessor with God for all men. She resolves never to turn a tired and deaf ear to, nor to have an unfeeling heart for, those who are in need in this sad vale of tears and sorrows.

As it was congenial to the merciful heart of Mary to dispense consolation without intermission in the future, to heal and save sinners, and exercise a mother's love towards suffering humanity, so did it suit still more the natural inclination of the humble maid of the Lord to continue to live in her hitherto retired life, unknown and unnamed in the world. Alas, Christian reader, among all the beings adopted into sonship by Mary under the cross of her dying Son, how many are unworthy children, and no comfort to their Mother! Many are rebellious children who carry anguish to their Mother's heart. Others are unfaithful and become her reproach. Christian reader, have

you, during that portion of your life already passed, brought uninterrupted comfort and satisfaction to the tender feelings of your mother, the Church? Are you to her an honor or a disgrace, a joy or a sorrow?

FIAT.—BE IT DONE.

"*Fiat.*" At the beginning of the first creation, when chaos and darkness still lingered over God's work, the Almighty Creator said, "*Fiat*," "Let there be light, and there was light." In the beginning of the second creation the Blessed Virgin utters her "*fiat*," Let there be light, and it was light; the Light of the world, the Light to illumine those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; the Light that burns on the mountain-top. In the very moment that the simple virgin uttered her "*fiat*," and thus expressed her willingness, the angel's message begun to be realized in the Incarnation of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the chaste womb of that same Blessed Virgin Mary. The angel vanished, the heavens opened, a torrent of light from the fulness of the Holy Ghost descended on the entranced virgin as she knelt absorbed in silent prayer. Mary becomes the Mother of God, and the Divine Word is made flesh from the sacred person of the Virgin Mary. What a jubilee burst forth among the heavenly hosts! What an awakening among the inmates of limbo! What a happiness for Mary. Only the cold and stolid earth, the very part of God's creation most affected by this ineffable mystery, lies supine and indifferent in its slumber of sloth and of death. To move that earth, to rend its rocks, still more is required; the death of the Lord Himself is required.

Christian reader, rejoice and be glad with grateful, loving heart. In sentiments of joy, happiness, and gratitude repeat three times every day, when the bell warns you,

the Angelus, established to commemorate the angel's greeting and the beginning of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. In such sentiments, too, of joy and thankfulness, celebrate every year on the 25th of March, the Feast of the Annunciation, known to our forefathers as "Lady Day in Spring." Even now, give utterance to your joy and gratitude in the following prayer:

Thrice holy and ever adorable Trinity, in my happiness I thank Thee from the bottom of my whole heart, because Thou didst resolve to save poor, fallen, sinful humanity. In my joy, I thank Thee that this great benefit has been effected through the mediation of the Eternal Word, and because the ever-blessed Virgin was chosen by Thee to be the holy medium whereby He would come into this world. I rejoice and thank Thee for this great benefit, in my own name, and in the name of all salvation-seeking men. I share these feelings of joy and these sentiments of gratitude with the joy and gratitude of all the holy angels. I rejoice at the infinitely rich abundance of honor and glory, that has accrued to Thee, O God, through the Incarnation of Thy only begotten Son. All this, O Lord, I offer to Thee.

Ever-blessed and venerated Virgin, I rejoice with all my heart at the honorable and honored greeting that the Angel Gabriel extended to thee. I rejoice that thou art so worthy of this praise. But I rejoice still more that thou wert chosen above and before all thy fellow-creatures to be the Mother of God. I congratulate thee on this pre-eminent honor, and thank thee according to my weak strength, for having accepted this dignity. At the same time, I beseech thee that thou wouldst turn to the profit of this poor world, thy dignity, thy merits, and thy love for me and for all other poor sinners. Amen.

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PART IV.

HOW THE BLESSED VIRGIN LIVED AND SUFFERED AS MOTHER OF GOD.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN VISITS HER COUSIN ST. ELIZABETH.

MORE SPIRITUAL FAVORS.

THE holy Archangel Gabriel leaves the humble home of Mary at Nazareth, and wings his flight aloft, in order to convey to the heavenly choirs the glad tidings of Mary's "*fiat.*" The Virgin was once more alone in her apartment. For a long, long time, she remained in a holy trance. As day succeeded day from the time of the angel's visit, a series of ever new and divine operations took place, increasing the fervor of her soul, and adding new accessions to her inner strength. Daily she acquired new light from Divine Wisdom, which had established its throne in her humble habitation. Her perception of God became clearer and more penetrating than was ever before or since vouchsafed to any saint. Yet this exact and full perception of the Deity was not of such a nature as to extinguish in her heart the meritorious virtues of faith and hope. On the contrary, she surpassed all other mortals in the exercise of these virtues. Christian reader, would you call up before your mind's eye a feeble picture of the sacred state of mind, of the ineffable

happiness, of the nearness to God, of the fulness of grace, and of the wealth of virtue existing in the soul of the ever-blessed Virgin from the moment of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ? Then recall your own state of mind, your own feelings at the solemn moment of receiving holy communion. Is there in human life, a moment of purer, sweeter, or more heavenly joy than the moment of our intimate union with God, with the most admirable and most amiable Good, with Eternal Love itself, in the Blessed Sacrament?

THE JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAINS.

If a man possessed the whole world with all its pleasures and honors, and yet was alone, and unable to find a companion with whom he might share his vast possessions, the whole earth would be but a joyless desert. Even the retiring Virgin of Nazareth felt a necessity of confiding to some heart worthy and capable of appreciating such mysteries, the near approach of the Messias, and the selection of herself to be His Mother. The information given to her by the angel, that Elizabeth, though then far advanced in years, had conceived a son, led Mary to hope that her saintly cousin, and even the fruit of her womb, might also have some connection with, and share in, the work of Redemption. Moreover, ever since the death of St. Joachim and St. Anne, the priest Zachary and his devout wife Elizabeth had been acting the part of kindly parents to the orphan Mary. Hence she longed to see her motherly friend, Elizabeth, not indeed from selfish motives, or to inform her of her new dignity of Mother of the Messias, but rather to gladden her cousin with the news of the angel's saving message, as well also as to congratulate her on her own expected progeny. "And Mary rising up in those days," that is to say, shortly after

the angel's visit, went into "the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda." (Luke. i 39.) Yes, "in haste" went the Virgin, borne on wings of holy love, joy, and desire: in haste, for it was not becoming for a young and inexperienced female to proceed too leisurely along such a journey, or even to tarry on the way. She was accompanied in her journey by a female companion. Her clothing was that usually worn in that country, consisting of a blue robe, a crimson cloak, and a white veil so thick that even her most intimate friends would pass her on the road without recognizing her. The supreme Queen of heaven proceeded barefooted over the rough mountain passes. Her journey, which consumed about three days, lay to a great extent in Galilee, then through hostile Samaria, and, finally, across nearly the whole of Judea, which latter country was traversed by mountains and cut up by rapid torrents.

Full of courage, with words of praise to God on her lips and gratitude in her heart, absorbed in holy meditation, the brave young maiden sped along her way, and, although slight and frail in body and limb, yet agile and fleet of foot. But in her immaculate womb she bore Him who is the strength of the weak, the comfort of the weary. She carried Him "who weighed the heavens with His palm, who hath poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance." (Is. xl. 12.)

Christian reader, this journey of the Blessed Virgin over the mountains was the first Corpus Christi procession. Mary was at the same time the ostensorium and the officiating high-priestess who carried the Holy of Holies. Dispensing blessings and graces He was borne along in the midst of His creatures. But the mysterious secret was concealed from the eyes of men who are devoid of faith or charity. Yet around Him hovered, in invisible attendance,

hosts of loving, adoring angels, chanting and doing homage to their Lord and Master. Whenever a Catholic priest is seen hurrying forward, alone, through field and forest, over hill and vale, in fair weather or storm, perhaps in the middle of the night, and carrying the Blessed Sacrament in trembling hand, or else on his throbbing breast, then and there, Christian reader, you witness a repetition of the Visitation.

MARY, ELIZABETH, AND JOHN.

The end of Mary's journey was Hebron, a sacerdotal city of about five hours' journey south of Jerusalem, and about thirty hours from Nazareth. Within this city, or near it, dwelt the pious priest Zachary. "And Mary entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb: and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: and she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished, that were spoken to thee by the Lord." (Luke i. 40–45.)

In the foregoing passage from St. Luke, an inexhaustible treasury of miracles and graces is held up to our pious contemplation. Not alone the heart of Mary and the home at Nazareth are sanctified by the Word made flesh. The fire of His love, the fulness of His graces diffuse themselves over the whole earth and penetrate into willing, deserving souls.

In order to know well and understand this wonderful

progress in its natural sense you must remember, Christian reader, that the house of Zachary at Hebron, like all the houses of Palestine, was surrounded by a closed courtyard. This had to be passed before entering the house itself. According to pious tradition the Blessed Virgin stood before the outer gate of the closed court, and called aloud to announce her presence and to make herself known. Thus it was that St. Elizabeth, before seeing Mary, knew her by her voice, and understood by what visitor she was honored. The emotions of delight experienced by St. Elizabeth were communicated in a miraculous, sanctifying manner to the unborn child in her womb. Illumined by the Holy Spirit, the venerable matron saluted the holy spouse of God, addressing to her in a loud voice the most sublime greeting in Israel: "Blessed art thou among women." She re-echoes the greeting of the Archangel Gabriel. He had uttered it in the name of the Church triumphant which, through the maternity of Mary, was re-established. Elizabeth utters it in the name of the Church militant which, by the sanctification of the Blessed Virgin, was awaking from its long sleep of death. But not alone the Blessed Virgin, but also "the fruit of her womb" was saluted as "blessed." Thus it is clear that St. Elizabeth, by a special and miraculous revelation from heaven, knew of the mysterious event that had taken place on Annunciation Day. How meekly and sweetly the discreet Virgin thanked the ever-good God for having anticipated her, and for having announced to her cousin, St. Elizabeth, this delicate subject, which she in her humility could hardly have had the courage to make known.

As in the home at Nazareth the humility of "the handmaid" was the fertile soil on which fell the seed of divine grace, so, too, in Zachary's house is the humility of St. Elizabeth the cause and condition of her own illumina-

tion and of the sanctification of her child. "Whence is this good fortune to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary, and, in age and by reason of the priestly dignity of her husband, would be, in the eyes of the world, far above the wife of a carpenter. But being above any selfish, proud consciousness of her superiority, she bows down humbly before the heaven-favored spouse and Mother of God, expressing touchingly her admiration and the sense of her own unworthiness to receive this visit from her cousin. Still more, too, does the mother of the Forerunner of Christ express in the above beautiful words.

In designating the Blessed Virgin as "the Mother of her Lord," Elizabeth gives utterance to the first profession of that faith that was to be held by all future generations; namely, that the divine nature of the Eternal Word was, in the chaste womb of the Blessed Virgin, united with the human, personal nature, and that consequently the chosen Mother of Jesus Christ has truly the right to be styled "the Mother of God." Finally, Elizabeth congratulates the Mother of God for having believed with her whole heart the promises of the Lord, as brought to her by the angel: "Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord." (Luke i. 45.) She had the more reason to congratulate Mary on her faith, inasmuch as her own husband, Zachary, was undergoing a severe trial for having doubted the promise of the angel in the Temple.

THE SAVIOUR AND HIS FORERUNNER.

As St. Elizabeth, in consequence of a supernatural revelation made to her, gave testimony to the maternity of her cousin so, too, does the Mother of God give testimony

of the high and holy destiny of the unborn son of that same Elizabeth. Concerning this unborn son, who was afterwards St. John the Baptist, the prophet Isaias predicted as follows: "Give ear, ye islands, and hearken, ye peoples from afar. The Lord hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother he hath been mindful of my name." (Is. xlix. 1.) The Lord visits His Precursor. St. John is the first among mortals to be cleansed from original sin by virtue of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. It was effected even before birth. In union with this miraculous remission of sin there came to the soul of the yet unborn child the knowledge of the presence of the divine Child in the chaste womb of the Virgin Mary. With what exact precision the angel's promise was fulfilled! "He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb." (Luke i. 15.) It is Jesus Christ who sanctified the child. But who was the medium of the sanctifying grace? Mary. It was Mary who carried the Son of God in her loving person to the presence of St. John's mother. At the very utterance of Mary's salutation the miraculous sanctification was effected.

Here you may discover, Christian reader, the exalted office assigned to Mary in the arrangement of man's salvation. Jesus Christ is, and will forever remain, the Fountain of all grace; in Him are contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in Him dwelleth the perfect plenitude of the living Godhead corporally. (Coloss. ii. 3, 9.) But He is pleased to make Mary a mediating channel of these grace-treasures, just as He was pleased to give us Himself through her mediation. This system of sanctification, established as it is by God, will endure to the end of time, for He cannot repent, nor will He repent, of having instituted this way to salvation.

SACRED FRIENDSHIP.

As the Holy Scriptures inform us, Mary tarried with her cousin, St. Elizabeth, for the space of three months, or till after the birth of the infant St. John. Three months of holy friendship, holy joy, and holy peace. Christian reader, enter in spirit into that happy home, join the company of these holy women. Listen attentively to their pious conversation, hear them pray together, observe their mutual attentions to one another, see how diligently they work side by side. Sacred and blissful visit! These pious souls passed the time of their visit in heavenly conversation, in vivid recollections of the mercy of God, in humble meditation on the mysteries of divine revelation. While we, Christian reader, you and I remain cold and indifferent with regard to the truths of our faith, ungrateful for the benefits of heaven, lukewarm in matters pertaining to the Gospel and the Church, so much so, that we do not speak of them with love or reverence, nay, perhaps we criticise them in a spirit of doubt and pride. Let us learn from Mary to sanctify by a religious spirit, all our visits and conversations, those occasions so often of grievous sin. Let us learn to avoid all useless visits, to shun all unholy, vain, useless, and uncharitable conversation. When the peculiarities of those whom we visit, or who visit us, do not permit us to converse always with edification, we should endeavor, by our outward modest demeanor, by our moderation in pronouncing sentences, by our dignified reserve, to repair the injury.

Such conduct will usually have the effect of making a favorable impression on the minds of others.

This visit of our sublime Mother of God to her cousin, St. Elizabeth, the haste and the fatigue connected with it, the spirit of godliness that pervaded all its circumstances, the long stay of three months, all show to us, Christian

reader, our loving Mother as a true friend, as a devout friend, as an upright friend, as a serviceable friend. The minds of men, when not altogether depraved, are disposed to sympathize with others in benevolence and friendship. But, alas, what a wicked distortion is often given to the name and feelings of friendship! How often friendship degenerates into a conspiracy of godlessness, how often Judas comes forth under the appearance of a friend and, by a kiss, betrays and gives away what is most sacred: destroying faith and innocence! Christian reader, show yourself in earnest in this matter, examine carefully whether the friends of your daily life are really a help or a hindrance to the saving of your soul. If they do not conduce to your spiritual advancement, then rend the ties which will soon bind your soul to vanity and sensuality. Examine, too, whether you discharge towards others the duty of true friendship, and whether you avail yourself, to the best of your ability, of this powerful means to work nobly and successfully for the spiritual welfare of your friends. But, first of all, reserve in your heart the place of honor for your amiable, holy, and beautiful friend, Mary, the Queen of heaven.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MAGNIFICAT.

THE HYMN OF PRAISE.

A FULL measure of the most fitting and well-merited praise was lavished upon the humble maiden from Nazareth by her cousin St. Elizabeth. A grand display of beautiful virtue took place at the Visitation. A fulness of miraculous favors was sent down from heaven upon all

these holy souls, the holiest that ever lived upon earth. In view of these miracles from heaven, in remembrance of the mysterious ways and works of Providence in effecting the redemption of mankind, in motherly feelings and appreciation of the nearness of God, in prophetic vision of God's future kingdom on earth, the pure soul of Mary elevates itself above the barriers of time and space, while, as a heaven-inspired seeress and chanter, she responds with grand and indescribable praise to the words of the Holy Ghost as uttered by the lips of the Mother of Christ's Precursor. This canticle of the inspired Virgin has been known, and loved, and sung in all languages and all places throughout Christendom. It is called "The Magnificat" from its opening word.

Christian reader, if you wish to obtain an insight into the pure, humble, and beautiful soul of your beloved Mother, meditate often and thoroughly on the canticle styled "The Magnificat." But, before we venture even to make any remarks on this hymn, let us pray together in praise and honor of the most high God. Let us, then, unite ourselves with the high and glorious sentiments with which the blessed Mother of God pronounced those heavenly words, which, even till to-day, have been repeated by all the saints, all the priests, and all the faithful, and which will be repeated till the end of time. With all possible reverence, then, with devotion and holy joy, sing its beautiful strains: "Magnificat anima mea Dominum."

"And Mary said: My soul doth magnify the Lord: And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me: and holy is His name. And His mercy is from generation unto generations, to them that fear Him. He hath showed might in His arm: He hath scattered the proud

in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath received Israel His servant, being mindful of his mercy. As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." (Luke i. 48–55.) Thus spoke the holy Mother of God.

EXPLANATION.

Consider, now, Christian reader, the rich and noble meaning of each separate thought in this canticle.

"Magnificat.—My soul doth magnify the Lord." Hardly was Mary praised by Elizabeth as the blessed among women, when she, on her part, hastens to praise the Lord as the source and object of all wonderful operations. "My soul doth magnify the Lord," that is to say, my whole soul and being shall be an unbroken hymn of praise to the all-merciful God. My intellect can have no pleasanter occupation than that of praising Him. My will knows no happier duty than that of subjecting itself to His holy will. My heart recognizes no object worthy of its love save God alone. My memory shall remember naught else save my God. My lips shall speak only of Him. Christian reader, do you, too, magnify the Lord by dedicating to Him thy whole being, thy outward deeds, thy inner life of soul?

"And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." As the unborn St. John leaped in his mother's womb for joy at the coming of his Lord, so too was the holy bride of heaven filled with joy and exaltation. That joy and exaltation has no object save her God. She does not rejoice in herself, nor in the privileges and favors bestowed upon her. This rejoicing in God is the only true, pure, real, and enduring joyousness. In what, and where, and when

do you rejoice, and find honor and glory, Christian reader? Happy you are, if, with St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, you can cry out: "I count all things to be but loss, for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ." (Phil. iii. 8.)

"Because he hath regarded the humility of His handmaid." What excites in Mary a homage of admiration towards God is because He directed His eyes of mercy upon her, who was living in poverty, who of all the daughters of Israel was the lowliest and least important, without outward elegance, unknown and unrecognized among the people, a carpenter's wife living in obscurity. It was not, therefore, her distinguished privilege that called forth her praises, but the condescension of God. How frequently, Christian reader, do our hearts chafe with sensations of baffled pride when the hopes and expectations of our self-love and self-esteem are not realized. How often we are tempted to complain because people do not know how to appreciate our superiority, our ability, our infallibility. And when, by permission of God and the concessions of our fellow-men, we attain even partially the wished-for distinction and advancement, we ascribe such success to our own merits.

"Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." Here Mary, inspired by the Holy Ghost, who permits her to see into the future, speaks with positive certainty of what will come to pass. She knows perfectly of the all-nation-all-times-all-creature-embracing nature of the grand work of Redemption, which has made its beginning in her. She knows, also, that henceforth her name will be inseparably allied to this sublime spectacle of a merciful, all-hindrance-conquering, all-desire-satisfying Omnipotence. She knows that every being, whether in heaven or on earth, who returns thanks to this Omnip-

stence, and loves this Love, and adores the miracle resulting from both united, and who acknowledges Jesus to be God, recognizing Him as Lord and Saviour, will also praise and thank, love and honor her whom God has chosen, and so filled with graces, that she might be His Mother. Mother of our Head, Jesus Christ; hence to the mystical body of the Lord, that is we who are as His members, she cannot be a stranger nor a mere disinterested, unsympathetic, highly honored, and respected historical character, but at once a Mother, loving and loved, blessing and blessed.

How plainly and fully the prophetic words of the virgin-seeress have been verified down to this very hour! Christian peoples of all ages and languages have entered into holy rivalry in glorifying the Mother of God. In all conditions and situations in life, in joy and grief, in happiness and misery, we turn in confidence towards Mary. The Pope in the chair of Peter, the ruler in his chair of state, the priest at the altar, the scholar in his study, the orator on his rostrum, the rich in their opulence, the poor in their need, the sinner in his sorrow, and the child in its innocence, all invoke and praise Mary. And you, Christian reader, are you on your side moved to fulfil the predictions of Mary? Do you glorify your Mother by cultivating her sublime sentiments and imitating her heroic virtues, by practising a child-like confidence, by diffusing and establishing her homage in the hearts of your friends?

"Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me: and holy is His name." It was not on account of herself nor of her personal merit that the humble handmaid of the Lord deemed herself worthy of being praised and called blessed by all generations, but on account of the great miracles that were to be wrought by God through her instrumentality. Verily, the Lord "hath done great

things" when He selected Mary and preserved her from original sin. Great things did He when He sent to her the angel's message. But the greatest was when He became man of the Virgin Mary, thus manifesting both His power and holiness, and by calling men to holiness, leading them and binding them to sanctity, as He Himself was holy. To you, too, Christian reader, He that is mighty hath done great things; for, in His infinite love, He loved you and called you to the true faith, to the heirship of heaven, to eternal happiness. He hath visited you with grace and mercy, and your misdeeds He hath washed away in an ocean of merciful oblivion. Remember, also, how often He has visited your soul in person at holy communion. What homage, what love do you pay in return to the Most High?

"His mercy is from generation to generations, to them that fear Him." The Lord showed mercy to the Fathers of the Old Testament by keeping them upright through hope in a Redeemer to come. He showed mercy when He fulfilled this hope through Mary. He will show mercy to the end of time by always pouring out His graces over the world and the souls therein, through the seven channels of the holy sacraments. But His mercy is for those only who fear Him; for the Saviour is to be not only to the resurrection, but to the fall of many. Christian reader, may Jesus Christ be to you, both in life and death, set for your resurrection. May you experience His mercy now and on the Day of Judgment.

"He hath showed might in His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away." Here the Blessed Virgin casts first her vision backwards on the grace-favored history of the Chosen People, and then

into the distant future on the destiny of men arrayed for and against the new kingdom of God. In the olden time Jehova led forth with power the Jewish people from the slavery of the Egyptians and destroyed Pharao in the midst of his pride. Poor, indeed, was Israel and thirsty for salvation, when the Lord led them forth from Egypt, raising them up and feeding them, while the kingdom of Egypt and the proud Chanaan found no favor in His sight. And now the Lord has chosen a humble handmaid to be His spouse and Mother. Soon, too, He will gather about Himself poor fishermen, making them His friends and the heralds of new and glad tidings. Soon will the powers of heathendom, the gates of hell, direct their assaults against the Church of Christ, but they shall not prevail against it. Soon will those be called blessed who hunger and thirst after justice, suffer persecution in its defence and for its sake. Those who will walk in humble faith will be fed with the bread that cometh down from heaven, the Son of Mary Himself who hath promised: "I am the Bread of life, whosoever cometh to Me shall not hunger, whosoever believeth in Me, shall not thirst." (John vi. 35.)

Happy you are, Christian reader, if you are meek and humble of heart, and thirst after justice, but yet, with a consciousness of your unworthiness, you sit down in the lowest places at the divine banquet for "he that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke xiv. 11.)

"He hath received Israel His servant, being mindful of His mercy. As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." The promises made to Israel by Jehova were mercifully fulfilled in and through Mary. Standing on the boundary line between the Old and the New Testament, she influences men from her sublime prophetic heights. She affects their beginning and their

end, uniting them in the sublime and glorious mystery of which she is the bearer. For all eternity, the descendants of Abraham will praise God's mercy that was brought to them through Mary. Christian reader, when you recall to mind the promises of mercy that have hovered over your path in life, do you not find yourself justified and bound in duty to cry out with Jeremias, the prophet of hope and of lamentation: "The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed: because His tender mercies have not failed. They are new every morning, great is Thy [His] faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, said my soul: therefore will I wait for Him. The Lord is good to them that hope in Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good to wait with silence for the salvation of God. . . . For the Lord will not cast off forever. For if He hath cast off, He will also have mercy, according to the multitude of His mercies." (Lam. iii. 22–32.)

MARY IS EQUALLY SUBLIME IN HER SPEECH AND IN HER SILENCE.

This then is "The Magnificat." Christian reader, the deeper you enter into the contemplation of the truths contained in "The Magnificat," the more brilliant and lovely becomes the image of the Blessed Virgin. Happy we if, like St. Elizabeth, we were permitted to hear the noble prophetess, all inflamed with divine charity, all beaming with celestial brightness, praising, in melodious accents and burning words, the infinite power, goodness, and justice of God. According to even prejudiced judges, this canticle of Mary is at once the most beautiful and significant in the Holy Book. To the children of Mary it is certainly a matter of laudable pride and heartfelt gratification that their amiable Mother has been surpassed by none in her praises of the Most High. She

herself appears here in full consciousness of her own greatness, and yet without any prejudice to her humility, which does not altogether consist in suppressing the same, but rather in publishing it as testimony and evidence of the power and mercy of God operating in her soul. Here she receives by anticipation all the honors that we render to her. And do what we can, say what we can, in her praise, we can only repeat imperfectly the words and sentiments spoken by her own lips through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

One more sublime truth is brought home to our notice by "The Magnificat." If Mary had not revealed to us in this canticle a portion of her greatness before God, we might be forced to believe that she herself had not an adequate idea of her importance, nor a due appreciation of it. In the silence that she everywhere else maintains, and in the lowly simplicity of her life, we would discover, perhaps, but an evidence of the insignificance of her share in the Incarnation. Admirable silence of those virginal lips that knew so well how to talk sublimely. What humility, what grandeur, what fidelity, what prudent reticence, to thus hold concealed in a severely tried, closely hidden, and deeply humiliated life, such profound heart-secrets of miraculous greatness; to understand and conceive and express them thus magnificently! What a bright light is thrown about our darkest moments by the words of this canticle! Voluntary silence, a complete absorption in God, in those circumstances when she had a right to exult, modesty in all her words and acts; such is the great mystery of the humble Mother of God.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MARY'S MOTHERHOOD REVEALED TO ST. JOSEPH.

THE HARD TRIAL.

MARY being once more at home, after her three months' visit to St. Elizabeth, applied herself to the discharge of her simple household duties, to prayer, and to the reading of the Holy Scriptures. Though dwelling on earth, her life was like that of an angel, for all her thoughts and actions were directed to the honor and glory of God. But the Almighty had not given to her in vain the plenitude of grace. She was expected to correspond to and co-operate with these graces. Even now there arose before her soul one of the hardest trials of her whole life; one where, in order to overcome the trial, she would be called upon to exercise all her heroic virtues: her faith, her hope, her love, her humility, her patience; and to exchange her hitherto peaceful state of mind for bitter tribulation.

Since the memorable Annunciation Day, on the 25th of March, when the Word was made flesh in her womb, some four or five months had elapsed and the heavenly mystery could no longer be kept concealed. But what was St. Joseph to do? Inoffensive and quiet, he was pursuing his path of duty. In his heart dwelt a serene consciousness of the most perfect inviolable purity. All along, even to the present trying moment, he had been a witness of the extraordinary holiness, piety, and innocence of his spouse, whom he loved above any other created being, and for whose sake he would have gone cheerfully to death. What was he to think at this per-

plexing and painful discovery of Mary's condition? His noble soul was incapable of harboring a suspicion against the innocence and fidelity of the Blessed Virgin. His dignity and his delicacy of feeling both forbade him to mention the subject to her. How afflicting to his tender heart must have been this uncertainty!

MARY'S RELIANCE ON GOD.—HER HUMILITY.

A person must be familiar with the tender solicitude of a maiden and understand her anxiety to preserve her good name untarnished, in order to form any idea of the trouble into which Mary would have been plunged, had she not a feeling of certainty that the Lord would make all well, and defend and preserve her honor in the sight of the world. But it pained her keenly to be obliged to notice how sad St. Joseph was, with what an anxious and perplexed air and countenance he went slowly about his duties. He was the noblest and most upright of men, and his heart was grievously oppressed. But you may ask, Christian reader, why did not the Blessed Virgin clear up this misunderstanding? One word of explanation would have satisfied St. Joseph, and re-established him in his peace of mind and in his confidence in herself; strange and unheard of, contrary as it might have been to all human experience and human notions, to tell of this extraordinary conception of the Son of God.

In this painful silence of Mary discover and admire her humility and her reliance on God. The secret held by her was a mystery of God, the miracle wrought in her was a wonder-work of God. To God, therefore, it belonged exclusively to reveal to whom He would this mystery and this miracle: as indeed He had already some months before revealed it to St. Elizabeth, and to the unborn son in her womb. This comforting conviction,

Mary cherished quietly in her breast, and awaited patiently the hour when the hand of Divine Providence Himself would draw aside the curtain; though, meanwhile, she had to bear in silence much anguish of soul while looking at the misery, suffering, and perplexity of her afflicted spouse, St. Joseph.

This mystery and wonder-work of God in the person of the Blessed Virgin was to her a most exalted honor: a distinguished privilege that raised her above the angels, and that was to extort from all generations unceasing praise and blessings. How, then, could this humble maiden of the Lord bring herself to make manifest of her own accord to any man this high distinction of hers? Her motive should be, in thus acting, to extol the goodness of God, as she had already done when uttering "The Magnificat." She could not, however, do the same, when there was only question of setting herself right in the eyes of men. Sooner would she permit an unjust suspicion to be cast upon her integrity, sooner would she prefer to suffer the sight of St. Joseph's anguish, rather than to glorify herself, or even to justify herself, or even to appear to do so. What an example of sublime humility!

ST. JOSEPH'S RESOLVE.

As soon as the grieved and deeply crushed St. Joseph had reflected maturely on the subject, after having sought light and guidance from heaven by fervent prayer, he felt compelled to adopt the only course left to him, and the one demanded by charity and justice. St. Matthew, in his holy Gospel, relates this event in the following words: "Whereupon Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privately." (Matt. i. 19.) Now, how are we to

consider this resolution, which certainly was very peculiar? How does it agree to the well-known justice of St. Joseph? This determination on his part did not take its rise from any feeling of displeasure at her silence, nor from any suspicion concerning her truth and fidelity. It was the natural outgrowth of his strict sense of justice, and of his deep sentiment of charity.

During all ages, Eastern maidens preserved intact with much care and watchfulness their bodily chastity. Moral delinquency among them, now, alas! so common among even Christians, was severely punished. According to the Jewish law it was death by stoning. (Deut. xxii. 20). Owing to this severe and stringent law, St. Joseph had reason to be deeply concerned, not only for the honor, but also for the life, of his spouse. Instead of enforcing the law against her and against her betrayer, he wished, by the most delicate measures possible, to rescue her from the danger which really threatened her. This he could effect by having recourse, in accordance with the usages of his nation, to a secret bill of divorce, which he would quietly place in her hand, and in which no mention would be made of the cause of separation, and to which not even a witness was to be admitted. In pursuing this course, he would certainly stand before the eyes of the world either as a giddy and thoughtless, or as a hard-hearted, man, who, without any cause, had abandoned a wife who enjoyed the highest reputation for every womanly virtue, and who, moreover, was now in a condition that needed manly help and protection.

But this upright, self-forgetful man would rather accept the character of being a cruel and faithless monster, than bring his highly esteemed spouse to exposure and misery. Do you understand now, Christian reader, the justice and magnanimity displayed in the resolution of St. Joseph to leave Mary privately?

LIGHT FROM HEAVEN.

So hopeful and courageous a silence on the part of the Blessed Virgin, such a high sense of justice and nobility on the part of St. Joseph, really deserved that God should solve the difficulty, explain all, and transform a painful suspense into a joyous certainty. St. Matthew, in the first chapter of his Gospel, thus narrates this event. "But while Joseph thought of these things," that is to say, on his purpose of leaving the Blessed Virgin privately, "behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying, Joseph, Son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost, and she shall bring forth a Son and thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins. Now, all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is God with us." (Matt. i. 20–24.)

As when, after a dark and threatening night of storm, the sun arises with more than ordinary brilliancy, lighting up and cheering the face of nature, so was St. Joseph's heart flooded with a very ocean of happy relief, as, on awaking from sleep, the clear and undoubted conviction of Mary's innocence and of his own unexpected honors was settled in his heart. Not only was anxious doubt removed and the painful perplexity cleared up, but he saw for the first time all the honors that God intended for himself; namely, that he was to be not only the spouse of the Blessed Virgin, but also of the Mother of God, and the foster-father of the infinitely powerful Lord of heaven and earth.

With a grateful heart, therefore, St. Joseph, the comforted and favored, fell upon his knees and bent himself to

the ground, to thank and praise the Most High for these precious graces. With what reverence, too, this humble man now met the virgin Mother! How, heartily and sincerely they united in singing the mercies of God! With what sentiments of love they talked about their exalted privileges, and their impending duties towards their expected Guest from heaven! How they encouraged each other to the performance of their work of piety! How they strove to become worthy of the high mission entrusted to them, and to gather increased merits!

Ask not, Christian reader, why God, who is so kind and good, was pleased to send upon His two favorite servants, Mary and Joseph, so severe a trial as the one that we have been considering in this chapter. What is more befitting to those souls who draw near unto the heart of Christ and its glory, than that they should have the most prominent share in His sufferings and cross? What other duties do they owe to redeemed mankind, than to present, by their noble example, in the most fascinating and encouraging pictures such virtues as have been almost entirely banished from the daily life of men, namely, a complete submission to the will of God and to His providence, a patience that rejoices in sacrifice, and a heartiness and a wise and prudent behavior in the most perplexing phases of life.

How easily, Christian reader, you lose courage and become exhausted, when the horizon of your future is darkened, when disappointed hopes and apparently misplaced confidence make your heart sick nigh unto death! At such times, remember not only the glorious example of St. Joseph, but with courage address to him a hopeful prayer, that he may preserve to you light and comfort such as were brought to him from heaven by the message of the angel.

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CHAPTER XXV.

MARY AND JOSEPH GO TO BETHLEHEM.—NO ROOM FOR THEM AT THE INN.

SALVATION DRAWS NEAR.

FROM day to day, heaven and earth, the angels, and those few chosen souls on earth who knew of the holy mystery, yearned more and more eagerly for the birth of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. More especially did the Blessed Virgin long with all the power of a mother's love, and all the ardor of love for God, to see the countenance of her Son and her Saviour.

The sublimest grace and the greatest happiness of a soul is to see God. Mary was now on the point of seeing that divine-human countenance which illumines the vaults of heaven for all eternity. She was soon to see filial love, welcome, and fondness in those eyes whose brilliancy shed the light of joy over all those millions of spirits who stand, and who will stand, about the throne of God. During many years she was to look upon this lovely face daily and hourly. She was to contemplate it as it developed in beauty and expression of character, and even acquired her own features and expression. She was to look upon this divine face in all its apparent unconsciousness of infancy, in the charming frankness of boyhood, in the more serious earnestness of mature manhood. But, still more did she long for the light, the grace, the salvation that the Saviour of the world was to bring to the world.

Gradually and in holy union with God passed the peaceful months that preceded the birth of a new Child

of earth. The happy mother lived in the certain hope that a kind Providence would Himself direct and order all things so that His Son and hers would see the first light of this world in that place and under those circumstances that His sacred will demanded, and as the predictions of the ancient prophets had foretold.

It was well known to the Blessed Virgin, who had carefully studied the Scriptures, that the prophet Micheas, more than seven hundred years before had designated Bethlehem as the predestined birthplace of the Redeemer. His words were: "And thou Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousand, of Juda: out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel, and His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity." (Mich. v. 2.)

Nazareth was about five days' journey from Bethlehem. At this season of the year the weather was wet, rough, and inhospitable. The Virgin, blessed among women, was awaiting from day to day her important hour of delivery. But in what manner was the promise to be fulfilled? Admire and adore, Christian reader, the wise dispensations of God, who guides the hearts of men, of princes, and of beggars, of the godless and the righteous. It is not an angel from heaven that delivers to the anxious Virgin the order to repair to Bethlehem. No, it is the Roman Emperor, Cæsar Augustus, who becomes, in the hand of the eternal King, the commander on this point, and the instrument of the divine will, that thus might be verified the old prophecy written in the Scripture, that in Bethlehem the Messias was to be born.

REASONS FOR THE JOURNEY.

"And it came to pass that in those days, there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that the whole world

should be enrolled. And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city." (Luke ii. 1, 3.) This proud and powerful ruler of the widely spread Roman Empire expected, by this census and enrolment of the people, to add glory to his reign, and to facilitate the collection of the oppressive taxes gathered from his conquered provinces, to be used whether in peace or at war. Judea had been reduced to the sway of the Roman sceptre. As in that country society, whether civil or religious, was founded on tribal and family government, each individual was required to have himself registered in the home of his family.

Joseph, being of the house and family of David, was obliged by the law to report himself before the government officials in Bethlehem, which was David's city. On hearing orders to this effect, anxiety and perplexity seized upon the noble soul of Joseph, as he thought of his beloved and tender spouse. He could not obtain an exemption, nor substitute another in his place. He did not dare, under the circumstances, to leave his tender spouse alone and unprotected, he feared to take her with him on so arduous a journey. But Mary quickly discovered it to be the will of God that she should accompany St. Joseph to Bethlehem.

The wise and prudent Mary had a strong presentiment that she would not soon return to Nazareth. She therefore provided herself with some few things necessary for herself and her expected infant. St. Joseph provided other necessaries for the journey. The day of departure arrived. The mountain torrents rushing down into the valleys below, rendered many parts of the roads difficult and dangerous to travel. The cold north-wind was sighing among the branches of the tall terebinth-trees, and heavy, leaden clouds already foreboded the near approach of the inclement season. It was towards the end

of December, in the year 748 after the foundation of Rome, that the holy pilgrims came forth from their peaceful home which they committed to the care of God who had already protected it for the nine previous months. The Queen of heaven mounted the beast of burden standing in readiness, St. Joseph threw his cloak about his shoulders, grasped his long pilgrim staff with one hand, and with the other seized the bridle of the faithful animal. Thus they wended their way through the streets while the friends and neighbors on either side bid them of Nazareth, godspeed and safe and early return to their home.

Consider here, Christian reader, how Jesus Christ, while yet in His Mother's womb, leaves even His earthly home, out of the same love for us that moved Him to leave even the uncreated bosom of His eternal Father, that He might be still more sensibly our friend. By His journey to Bethlehem, He wishes to show us that He would not only be obedient to his Holy Mother, but also that He came to be "very slave to our behests, and even to adapt Himself to our whimsical nature. At the command of an earthly potentate, He repairs to Bethlehem. Although by descent an Israelite, although as God, He had loved His own people with a divine, unceasing, and unmerited love for centuries, He now obeys a foreign despot who, in the chances of war, had reduced the Jewish people to subjection. He comes at a time when that royal pagan was counting his subjects and numbering the souls in each province. As if His very humility were in a hurry he comes in order to be officially and formally enrolled on the lists as a conquered subject in the very hour of His birth. Is it not wonderful, Christian reader, that the same humiliation against which the creature conceives such an invincible repugnance should have a special attraction for the Creator?

HARDSHIPS OF THE JOURNEY.

Considering the delicate condition of the Blessed Virgin, and remembering the severity of the season, we can understand how trying this journey must have been, even though performed in short, daily stages. Although she everywhere received the respect always shown among the Jews to females of Mary's condition, yet, owing to her sensitive nature, her virginal modesty was often severely tried. Therefore, an all-wise Providence compensated and strengthened her by unspeakable consolations of soul. Absorbed in the adoration and contemplation of Divinity, and accompanied by choirs of angels, the tender pilgrim pushes on her way.

It was the evening of the 24th of December. The sun was shedding his last feeble rays down through the parted clouds on the city of Bethlehem when our pious pilgrims reached the height over against the town. On catching the first glimpse of the city of her forefathers, and remembering the impending grace-bringing birth of Jesus, St. Joseph cried out: "Thou, Bethlehem, art a little one among the princely cities of Juda, but out of thee shall He come forth unto me, that is to be the Ruler in Israel, and His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity." White-veiled ladies, wearing rich purple mantles, rode by on camels; rich merchants, mounted on fleet Arabian steeds, galloped past them; the great ones of Israel, in pompous dignity, rode by solemnly on their jennets without deigning to cast a glance at the Queen of heaven. They were hurrying on to Bethlehem to secure comfortable lodgings, for within the last few days many strangers had crowded into the city. St. Joseph himself, almost exhausted, urged the beast of burden to its utmost speed, in order to reach the town and secure shelter before nightfall.

Just outside the wall surrounding the city, there stood a massive square building, whose white walls formed a strange contrast with the pale green foliage of the fig-trees that mantled the hill-side. This was called the Chan, and was a sort of inn for strangers, where, though refreshment was seldom found, yet the shelter of a roof could be obtained. Here the holy pilgrims entered timidly, "but there was no room for them in the inn," says Holy Scripture. (Luke ii. 7.) For them! There was no lack of accommodations, but the landlords reserved the remaining available places for wealthier guests who were expected, while the most worthy and holiest persons of either heaven or earth were turned away because of their poverty.

BETHLEHEM RECEIVES NOT ITS OWN.

Overwhelmed with grief and confusion at this disgraceful treatment, the holy patriarch endeavored to console his worn-out companion, who responded by a pleasant smile of resignation. He had been born in Bethlehem, and several of his friends still lived there, who, no doubt, would extend to him a kind welcome and friendly hospitality. Again seizing the bridle of the poor tired beast, he entered the city proper, wandered through the streets, hoping that some compassionate Bethlehemite would, for love of God, offer him shelter for the night. From house to house, from door to door, they strayed, while the cold night-air went through the tender frame of the Blessed Virgin who, though uttering no word of complaint, grew paler and fainter, till she could hardly keep her seat on the beast. Avarice, the besetting sin and reigning passion among the Hebrews, denied a resting-place to Jesus Christ, just as that same vice in the heart of Judas, would again, three-and-thirty years later, deliver Him up to His enemies.

Night, dark and gloomy, had now settled down upon the town of Bethlehem, whose inhabitants made merry with the strangers in the inns and the private houses. They laughed and joked, ate and drank, while outside their doors stood the Redeemer of the world, asking in vain for admission. Rejected by all men, despairing of being able to find shelter in the city of their fathers, the weary pilgrims left the inhospitable streets, not knowing where to direct their steps, and in the darkness of the night, wandered over a plain that resounded with the howls of wild animals hungry for their prey. To the east, not far from the city, there was a cave in the rocks, thirty-seven feet in length, eleven feet broad, and nine feet high. This cave was a sort of public stable, where the shepherds of Bethlehem sometimes drove their flocks for shelter against a sudden storm. To this poor place, the angel of God conducted the Queen of heaven and her virtuous protector. Here they decided to pass the night. Gladly and thankfully did these two holy hearts offer up a prayer to God for this friendly shelter.

THE EXAMPLES OF MARY AND JOSEPH.

Christian reader, not in mere dry words alone, but with tears and sighs should we speak of this fatiguing journey, and of the slights and neglect offered to the Mother of God by the hard-hearted people of Bethlehem.

Consider, then, in the first place, the indescribable patience and the admirable contentment of these holy pilgrims amid all the hardships of their journey. You can hardly bear a slight sickness or a little bodily pain without showing signs of discontent and impatience. You complain so bitterly and pettishly that you become an annoyance to those about you, who have nothing to do with your troubles

Consider, in the second place, the perseverance with which these strangers in Bethlehem sought for shelter. You become disheartened and vexed, because your doubtful and improper prayers and wishes do not find an immediate hearing before God and man. You think that the Lord of heaven and earth must grant your petitions at once, while He with patience inexhaustible has waited for your repentance, and hoped for your faithful conversion : you, meanwhile, wandering farther and farther from the ways of truth and justice.

Consider, in the third place, the poverty of the Holy Family. They might have supplied their wants and averted their ill-treatment by means of a few pieces of money, which, however, they did not possess. Every little trial in life you offer to God, as if it were a severe sacrifice. Well and comfortably clad, well fed, well esteemed by men, ensconced in a comfortable pew in a handsome church, there to read sweet prayers out of a pious book,—piety does not consist in that. The vigor of soul required for securing life eternal, for doing violence to heaven, and thus bearing it away, does not consist in such piety. Practise and love holy poverty, that is to say, a poverty voluntarily chosen and borne with cheerfulness, whether it be poverty in yourself or in others. He for whom the people of Bethlehem could make no room, nor afford a spot where He might enter the world to redeem and save it,—He declared poverty to be blessed, both by His word and example, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. v. 3.)

THE WARNING EXAMPLE OF BETHLEHEM.

Consider first the hardness of heart of the Bethlehemites. Certainly we may, to a great extent, excuse them, for

they sinned more through ignorance than malice. Had they the slightest idea of the heavenly dignity and just claims of the Blessed Virgin, they would have striven for the honor and glory of affording her hospitality. But still they offended against natural fellow-feeling and charity, against neighborliness, against the strict duty of assisting and sheltering the poor and homeless stranger. You cannot very easily excuse yourself on the plea of ignorance, when you refuse to open your heart to your Saviour. "How could that be possible in me?" you inquire indignantly. In many and various phases and circumstances, does God approach us in life and ask for favors. But we do not know Him.

God meets us under the appearance of every kind of trial. These bear on their face the stamp of God's doings, yet how often we seek to turn them away from us? God comes to us under the form of a neighbor. On the day of judgment the King of heaven shall say to them that shall be on His right hand:

"Come ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; naked, and you covered Me; sick, and you visited Me: I was in prison, and you came to Me. Then shall the just answer him, saying: Lord, when did we see Thee hungry, and fed Thee; thirsty, and gave Thee drink? And when did we see Thee a stranger, and took Thee in; or naked, and covered Thee? Or when did we see Thee sick or in prison, and came to Thee? And the King answering, shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me.

"Then He shall say to them also that shall be on His left hand: Depart from Me you cursed into everlasting

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fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave Me not to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me not to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me not in; naked, and you covered Me not; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me. Then they also shall answer Him, saying: Lord when did we see Thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to Thee? Then He shall answer them, saying: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to Me. And these shall go into everlasting punishment: but the just, into life everlasting." (Matt. xxv. 34–46.)

God comes to us in His own person. Imbued with the same undying love with which He wandered through the streets of Bethlehem poor and unknown, asking by the voice and virginal lips of His blessed Mother for admission, Jesus dwells in the tabernacles on our altars. By the voice of His priests, He invites and begs us to come to Mass, that He may visit our souls with a very wealth of divine grace. He invites, and earnestly exhorts, nay commands, us to approach holy communion, in order that He may most intimately unite Himself to our souls, and make them His resting-place. But we are deaf to His call of warning. On account of bodily or spiritual lethargy, on account of our fear for the opinions of evil men, we dare to refuse admittance to our Lord and God.

Consider the dreadful punishment that followed close in the wake of the Bethlehemites' hard-hearted treatment of Christ and the Blessed Virgin. They rejected a child, they shall soon be severely punished in the persons of their own children. But a few short weeks, and their streets and houses, that now resound with the voice of merriment and happiness, will re-echo the shrieks of woe and despair. The mothers will pray with wild despair

for their children, but their prayers will not be heard, because they refused to hearken to the prayers of the Mother of God. Therefore, Christian reader, be humble before God and merciful towards your neighbor, in order that you may obtain mercy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HOLY NIGHT.

CHRISTIAN reader, recall to mind the bright and happy days of your youth, with their Christmas joys and associations. Recall the simple, unquestioning faith, the childish sympathy, the sincere compassion you felt for the poor, weeping Infant Jesus. Recall the vivid representation of the stable at Bethlehem, and of all the personages and incidents connected with the birth of Christ as presented to your childish wonder on Christmas Eve in the so-called "crib." Once again think on your pious mother's explanation of the event of that night.

THE PLACE AND THE TIME.

In the first place, consider the circumstances of the locality and of the time in which Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.

Consider the stable. It was a home of poverty, a mere place of shelter for those creatures that are not fit to share the same lodgings with men. Mary was indeed the poor handmaid of the Lord. From the first moment of her existence she was segregated from the rest of the ordinary human family by her immaculateness. She was indeed to bring forth the Good Shepherd who, with shep-

herd's staff in His hand, was to go before His sheep, who all know Him, as He knows them and calls them by name, leads them out to wholesome, nourishing pastures, and seeking to gather them all into one sheepfold, which is His one and indivisible Church.

Consider the animals. A pious Christian sentiment, founded on the words of the Prophet Isaias ("The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel hath not known Me, and My people hath not understood"), has ever loved to represent the stable at Bethlehem at the birth of Christ as inhabited by an ox and an ass. There is something very touching in the presence of these two dumb beasts on this solemn occasion. In being born into this world, it pleased God to descend to the deepest humiliation, and to share this debasement with His humble Mother. Mary having been repulsed by her fellow-creatures, is forced to have recourse to the rude yet affectionate companionship of senseless beasts. These, with meek and blundering submission, welcome the Queen of heaven; doing the best they could with their fresh, warm breaths to temper the chilly frosts of a keen midnight in winter.

Consider the manger. This, the first throne on earth of the King of heaven, was hewn out of the white, chalky substance of the wall of the cave. White indeed, should be the color of Jesus' crib, for He was the spotless Son of the immaculate Virgin, though in every other respect it was infinitely unfitting to His sublime dignity. In this manger was usually placed the fodder for cattle. But not alone disgrace attaches to this crib, which holds the body of the Infant Jesus, a beautiful, appropriate, and prophetic foreshadowing is connected therewith. This crib foretold and foreshadowed the miracle of our Christian altars. It was a symbol of the dwelling of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist. It was, more-

over, a figure of His intimate, miraculous union with men. It was a sign of the abundance of His grace. It was a symbol of the treasury of divine grace, from which the Blessed Virgin would unceasingly draw and dispense, for she it was who laid the divine Son in it.

Consider the straw. Coarse straw forms the bed of Christ in the manger. This straw, which was the refuse of an Eastern threshing floor, unlike our clean and well-prepared straw, is generally damp and fetid. The cross, which was Christ's last death-bed, was a hard one indeed; but it was prepared for Him by His enemies and murderers. While the straw bed in the manger was arranged, as best it could be, by the hands of His own Mother.

Consider the darkness. The dull light from St. Joseph's rude lantern casts but a feeble and broken light amid the thick darkness. In the midst of this midnight gloom God appears in the world, out of pure love for men. This same love will be the motive for His painful martyrdom in broad daylight, in the face of all Jerusalem. That same love will be the light guiding His footsteps to Calvary. That hour of darkness, was the chosen, favorite time for the uncreated flash to burst forth from heaven. It was the heavy curtain that concealed Him, as does to-day the veil of the tabernacle. The deeper the darkness the brighter will be heaven's effulgence. That darkness is also a striking image of the hopeless and darksome abyss of error and wretchedness into which mankind had long been plunged, and out of which the Saviour had come to rescue them: a darkness, in which "the Orient from on high hath visited us; to enlighten them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death; to direct our feet into the way of peace." (Luke i. 79.)

Consider the coldness of the night. Even the very elements were unfavorable to their Creator; and so proved themselves as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

The winter frost almost stopped the circulation of the chilled blood in the trembling veins of the weak and helpless babe. The hands, that in their omnipotence had made heaven and earth, and in their goodness had blessed it, are shrunk together by the freezing cold. All the warmth of Mary's motherly love, aided by the sweet and wholesome breath of the meek and friendly cattle, could hardly succeed in keeping these hands of Jesus warm. But yet, the coldness of nature was not to be compared with the coldness, still and stiff as death, that prevailed among mankind. It was like a Polar sea, a wilderness of frozen icebergs; like a mountain glacier, always stealthily extending its evil influence farther and farther, and on whose barren, fruitless sides the sun's rays fall in vain. Now Jesus Christ comes to break the icy bonds of this long-continued frost, for He Himself tells us through the writings of His Evangelist, St. Luke: "I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled." (Luke xii. 49.) Such, Christian reader, are the preparations for the advent of the King of eternal glory into this world: a stable, two animals, a manger, some straw, darkness, and cold.

THE INFANT JESUS.

In this stable, in this darkness, in this cold, before the beasts and the crib with its straw, stood the Blessed Virgin, weary and sad, hungry and cold. And yet this stable and the much-despised maiden in this stable compose the very centre of the universe, aye, and almost to the same intense degree, the very centre-point of heaven itself. In compensation for her extreme poverty, heaven's favored daughter was filled with ecstatic joy and comfort from heaven. She saw clearly that the momentous hour had come. Holy angels, jubilant with joy, hovered about her,

dispelling all trouble from her mind and all suffering from her body. St. Joseph having withdrawn to a small separate cave, the Blessed Virgin knelt upon the cold, damp ground absorbed in silent prayer. This prayer soon developed into a state of miraculous ecstasy. She saw the glorious mysteries of the Godhead. She saw the sublime designs of God in His admirable dispensations. She saw the Incarnation of the Son of God, the very crown and keystone in the arch of God's mercy. With a sacred, loving yearning, she now desired to receive this God-made Man in her extended arms, and to clasp Him to her breast. This act of intense longing on the part of Mary just coincided with the moment predestined from all eternity as best suited for the birth of the Eternal Word. The rude sides and roof of the grotto faded away from sight amid the choirs of brilliant angels and the dazzling flash of heaven's glory. A mysterious movement, imperceptible to human senses, pervaded all nature. As the ray of light from the sun penetrates the crystal, so did the King of eternal glory come forth from His virginal bridal chamber. In the stable at Bethlehem a new and especial sun had arisen, before whose dazzling rays even the brilliant glory of the pure Mother of God herself faded into paleness. At her feet lay the Creator of the universe, the future Judge of us all, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer, a mere child ; but yet clothed in celestial light, in heavenly beauty, in heavenly innocence.

Still and silent knelt in prayer and adoration the divine Mother, till a gentle motion and a feeble wail of the infant, of the Son of God, of her own child, aroused her to natural consciousness. She looked down and saw her child. What a rapturous look was this first look of Mary's on the divine Infant! It was a very ocean of bliss and blessings. In this first look she discovered in the face of Jesus a thousand heavenly miracles, yet saw

that His loveliness was inexhaustible. She saw that in the sunshine of His perfect features the beauty of all the angels in heaven was reflected. In this mirror, she sees the reflection of her own countenance, and in the same moment becomes more and more like unto her God, her divine Original. The babe, too, returns His Mother's look, by a glance of grace and love. At this look an extremely mysterious change takes place in the soul of the virgin Mother. God had changed His relations to her, and so the fulness of grace is changed, in the only mode possible, namely, by a great and almost incredible increase. By the birth of Christ she was clothed in a new fulness of purity: for God augmented such grace by the manner of His birth, as He had on a former occasion augmented it by the manner of His incarnation. This is the third degree of the immeasurable holiness of the Blessed Virgin, after the Immaculate Conception and the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost.

This look of the divine Infant expressed and revealed His mature powers of reason with a full consciousness and an infinite wisdom. Yet it did not distort or dispel the tender, innocent beauty of the helpless babe. This tender, loving look of His invited confidence, and by its gentle, quiet nature moved to worship and adoration.

ADORATION.

The first look, the first thought, the first emotion of Mary's motherly heart was an act of adoration. Who can measure the depths, the inwardness, loveableness, and loveliness of this homage? This act of Mary's embraces all that Jesus Christ is and has. It covers this all with praise, admiration, reverence, joy, love, and exultation. His human nature, now eternally and inseparably united with the divine nature in One Divine Person, she adores

ardently, tenderly, and with the clearest insight, as well as with the deepest humility; with the tenderest love and with the most reverential admiration and wonder. She adored the eternity of Him who, according to the flesh, was but one minute old. In His weakness she honored His omnipotence. She saw her Son lying before her speechless, yet discovered and worshipped, in Him, infinite treasures of truth and wisdom. Her eye fell upon an infant trembling in the icy coldness of the midnight air; yet her soul adored Him as the plenitude and fountain of all happiness to Himself and others. Christian reader, if this wisest of virgins could have embodied this act of adoration in words that we could understand, what a glorious *magnificat* she would have chanted!

This first, all-embracing act of adoration was performed by the Blessed Virgin not alone for herself personally. She was conscious of the position that was given her in God's creation, she therefore included all humanity as well in her act of homage and in her heart. For our sake she offered herself up to the new-born Infant. She declared herself ready to be our Mother, although she well knew that our spiritual regeneration would be for her an act full of the most painful sacrifice. For us, too, she offered her child, Jesus, to the eternal Father. This act of worship so worthy of God, offered up to the Saviour-God made man, by His newly made Mother, for herself and for her fellow-creatures, required but a moment of time.

Now, a mother's instinct clamored in her heart, urging attention to the helpless infant. Jesus Christ was not only Mary's God, He was also her child. With a dignified, gentle inwardness, altogether indescribable, the virgin Mother bent down over her Son, embraced Him with transports of delight, and pressed Him to her throbbing bosom. And as she stretched forth to Him her timid,

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eager arms, there appeared upon the countenance of the Son of God a sweet smile that enraptured all the observing angels. It was the intelligent smile of a child recognizing his mother, the happy smile of the Creator recognizing His beautiful and perfect masterpiece of creation. It was the smile of a heavenly Father approving and rewarding the many acts of sacrifice in Mary's life. Then the Blessed Virgin arose, pressed her infant to her heart rapturously, imprinted a fervent kiss on His adorable brow. Then "she wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger," as St. Luke so sweetly and so simply describes in his holy Gospel. (Luke ii. 7).

ST. JOSEPH ADORES.

During this sacred and solemn hour, St. Joseph had also given himself up to prayer, in an apartment by himself. Now he drew near to the blessed manger, in order to pay divine homage to the child over whom he had been commanded to preside as foster-father, and to testify to Him his fatherly love. Simple, gentle, dignified, as was his whole nature, was his first advance towards Divine Majesty. His tranquil soul resembled a sea at rest, that in its depths conceals untold treasures, while its surface lies in quiet innocence of all below, merely reflecting the beauty of the sun. It was his peculiar high privilege and duty to be the representative on earth of the eternal Father; hence he endeavored to imitate in his life the serenity and gentle tranquillity of God. It is just this gentle and quiet simplicity that is most acceptable to the divine Child, and makes us most like to Him. St. Joseph presented himself to the new-born Saviour-God as an unworthy servant. He offers and dedicates to the service of his new charge, all his time, his labor, his cares,

his joys, his love. Once again the Infant sanctified him by a kind look and approving smile, strengthening him with a surprising new strength, and elevating him to a lofty height of unspeakable holiness and grace, in order that he might be fitted for his most extraordinary and most mysterious office of guide, director, and commander of God.

OUR ACT OF HOMAGE.

Now, Christian reader, you too, in your turn, may venture to enter, in spirit, the stable of Bethlehem. May your soul be free from at least every mortal sin, otherwise you would be totally unworthy to appear before these sanctified persons. But no, for the moment let us not be so anxious about our misery; let all our senses, all our love be directed to the Infant Jesus. Animated with this full, entire, undivided, reverential happiness, utter from the bottom of your heart the following greeting of welcome to your new-born Saviour in the manger:

"Ever-gentle, kindly, amiable, Infant Saviour, with deep humility, I fall on my knees before Thee and adore Thee from the bottom of my heart. I bid Thee welcome, most high God, most gracious Lord, welcome to earth. A thousand heartfelt congratulations I offer to Thee on the occasion of Thy happy birth, and of Thy whole life on earth. As a flower spreads out its leaves towards the rays of the sun, so does my heart with all its powers and desires turn to Thee. As I, in most sincere love, do embrace Thee, so do Thou embrace my soul. Take me into Thy favor. For the sake of Thy grace-bringing birth remember not the manifold offences that I have committed against Thee. I humbly implore Thee for forgiveness of my sins. Remember, O Jesus, that thou camest into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. Seek, then, and save my lost soul, drag it out of the slime of sin.

"All-holy, ever-blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with special love and joy I salute thee, and congratulate thee on thy virginal delivery. I salute thee and praise thee in union with all the angels and in union with the first amiable look and first smile of thy heavenly Child for His Mother. O thou most blessed Virgin, Mother of God, by the happy birth of thy Son obtain for me favor with God, and secure for me from thy divine Son the forgiveness of my sins. Thou canst obtain from Him any favor; for He is really in thy arms, and at thy disposal. Ah! reconcile me with Him, and obtain that He receive me into His favor and friendship. True-hearted mother, by the overwhelming joys and graces that thou didst receive at the birth of thy Son, encourage me in my troubles and hear my supplications. Remember it was for that purpose thou didst become the Mother of God, namely, to be an intercessor for poor penitent sinners, a help to reconcile them to God. Show me thy strength, and by thy grace-bringing intercession rescue me from the dangerous state of sin.

"Blessed, happy St. Joseph, I beg also of thee that thou wouldst turn to my advantage and benefit, poor sinner that I am, all thy glory and happiness, all thy honor, triumph, and dignity as foster-father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. May thy steady faithfulness, thy tranquillity of soul, thy simplicity of heart, become mine, and help to make me worthy of eternal happiness. Amen."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SHEPHERDS ARE CALLED TO THE MANGER OF BETHLEHEM.

OUR eyes, Christian reader, are too short-sighte and imperfect, our imagination is too dull and weak to enable us to see clearly and appreciate fully the glory produced in heaven by the birth of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, both in the eternal Father and in the Holy Ghost, as well as among the choirs of angels, and in limbo among the souls of the expectant just. Therefore let us examine to whom, among the children of men on earth, the glad tidings of this birth were first brought, and how they were received.

THE ANGELS BRING GLAD TIDINGS.

The promises and predictions of centuries were fulfilled and verified, the divine Messias had come upon earth, and lay, a beauteous babe, in the manger of Bethlehem's stable. Should this sublime miracle remain an unknown secret, or should the happy parents of this Child proclaim everywhere the tidings of salvation? The same kind Providence who thus far had so wisely and so admirably conducted events, would also take care to watch over the further fulfilment of His eternal decrees. Such conviction was firmly planted in Mary's heart.

"And there were in the same country shepherds watching, and keeping the night-watches over their flock. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the brightness of God shone round about them, and they

feared with a great fear. And the angel said to them : Fear not : for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people : For this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you : you shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in the manger." (Luke ii. 8–12.)

What a lovely, heart-lifting scene is presented to our admiring gaze by these simple words of the holy Gospel! The shepherds were distant about three miles from the scene of Our Saviour's birth. On these same fertile plains of Bethlehem, the patriarch Jacob and David, the royal ancestor of Jesus, used to feed their flocks in the olden times. It should not be a matter of surprise to us, Christian reader, that the flocks of sheep were able to find sustenance at this season of the year outside the pen and barn. At the time that our winter sets in, the rainy season begins in Eastern lands. During these days of rain, the earth which, during the summer season, by reason of the intense heat, was burned dry and brown, is covered with a fresh green crop of after-grass. Here in the vicinity of Bethlehem, and towards Hebron, were fed the flocks of sheep and herds of cattle needed for the unceasing sacrificial service in the Temple. It was thus very fitting that Christ, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world, should be born near the lambs of sacrifice, on the plains of Bethlehem, and should first announce Himself as the Good Shepherd to these devout shepherds.

Who are these shepherds, and how did they merit the distinction of being the first summoned to the grace-throne of Divine Majesty? We know but little of them, Christian reader. We see them only for a moment in the starlight of Christmas eve, and almost at the same time enveloped in the glory shining from on high. They then disappear, and their subsequent history, like their earlier

lifetime, is kept concealed from us. Like St. Joseph's history, theirs is hidden in obscurity. In this respect they resemble him. They possess his hidden life and his simplicity, without his high dignity of office. An angel of the Lord speaks to them, but they are not on that account proud or puffed up; neither are they cast down; they are afraid only on account of the unusual dazzling light that surrounds them.

How condescendingly Our Lord and Saviour accommodates Himself to the lowliness and simplicity of these poor shepherds. They are men who have grown up amid the mildest and gentlest of the animal creation, the lambs that they cared. Now their inward life dispositions have assumed a lamb-like character. Beside this simplicity, there is visible in the characters of these first worshippers of Jesus an imperturbable peacefulness and contentment. Yet the life of such a shepherd was not an enviable one As a class, they were poor, living a life of hardship, obscurity, and loneliness. They seldom lived within doors, and the comforts and joys of home-life were almost unknown to them. They often passed the night, as well as the day, on the dreary mountain-side, or amid the chilly, penetrating mists of the valleys. The drenching rains and the howling winds became their familiar companions. Yet these good men were contented and happy. In their souls reigned a blessed peace of conscience, out of which grew and thrived adoration and heroic virtue.

Thus, Christian reader, were the first adorers of Jesus Christ fitted and prepared: bearing a pleasant resemblance to Him and His Mother, in holy simplicity and contentment. They had the dispositions of children, to whom alone is promised admission into the kingdom of heaven.

"There are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble: but the foolish things

of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise: and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong: and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and things that are not, that He might bring to naught things that are: That no flesh should glory in His sight." (1 Cor. i. 26–29.)

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS.

Hardly had the angel proclaimed the glad tidings to the wondering shepherds, when suddenly a great multitude of celestial spirits appeared, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good-will." Christian reader, if God Himself stooped down to meet humanity, why should not the created inhabitants of heaven come nearer to men. As in the olden time, after the choice of a ruler, or the enthroning of a young king, heralds hurried over the country announcing the happy event and lauding the new prince, so did the angels, on Christmas morning, announce from on high the tidings of joy and peace to all men.

To God alone belongs all glory, adoration, praise, and honor. Because men in their blindness did not advance the glory of God, the Son of God wished, by becoming man, to re-establish this glory of the Father. The glory of the whole work of Redemption redounds to the Lord, just as the holy Mother of God, on her side, ascribes to the Most High the glory of her privileges and graces. "My soul doth magnify the Lord." The *peace* however is bestowed upon man, to whom it belongs. By a special dispensation of Providence, a universal peace prevailed throughout the world when Mary brought forth the Prince of peace. At Rome the temple of Janus, the god of war, was closed: a fitting sign of the dawning of a

universal peace of God that was soon to gladden the whole earth, and to consist in reconciliation between God and man, reconciliation between man and man, reconciliation of every man with himself.

This angelic song, therefore, "Gloria in Excelsis Deo," Glory be to God on high, is a canticle sung by the Catholic Church in praise and thanksgiving for the glory that has accrued to God, and for the graces of peace and happiness that have come to man forevermore through the mystery of the Incarnation. The centre of this glorification to God and of these graces to men is the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, the adorable sacrifice of the Mass, where the God-Man, Our Saviour, is ever present, offering Himself for us to the eternal Father. When, therefore, Christian reader, at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, you hear the priest of the most high God intone solemnly the Gloria, your heart should respond to these tidings of joy with all the humble belief and ardent love of the shepherds of Bethlehem.

Even now, Christian reader, repeat devoutly in the spirit of the Church this glorious canticle of praise with sentiments of joy and thankfulness, as well for the incarnation of Christ in the stable at Bethlehem, as in gratitude for His continued living presence on our altars. In union with the blessed angels in heaven and with all Catholic priests in the world say: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good-will. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we adore Thee, we glorify Thee. We give Thee thanks for Thy great glory, Lord, God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty. Only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, Thou who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Thou who takest away the sins of the world, hear our prayer. Thou who sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For thou alone art holy.

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Thou alone art Lord. Thou alone art the Most High, art Jesus Christ, with the Holy Ghost in the glory of God the Father." Amen.

THE SHEPHERDS AT THE MANGER.

"And it came to pass, after the angels departed from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another: Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us. And they came with haste: and they found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in the manger. And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this child. And all that heard wondered: and at those things that were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God, for all the things they had heard, and seen, as it was told unto them." (Luke. ii. 15–20.)

Nothing could seem more improbable than the truth contained in the angel's message: that the Messias, who, according to the commonly accepted opinion of the Jews, was to come with great power and glory, was really born in a stable, and lying in a manger. Yet the shepherds believed, and prepared to go at once to Bethlehem. Away they hastened, deterred by nothing, neither the improbability of the tidings, nor their solicitude for their flocks. Guided by the angels, they entered the stable and found Mary! Christian reader, these poor pious shepherds are not simply the first worshippers of Jesus Christ; they are, moreover, the first venerators of the Mother of God. But yesterday was she rudely and contemptuously turned away from the inhospitable doors of Bethlehem. To-day, inhabitants of the same town offer her the expression of their most respectful veneration.

With what simple, childlike respect these shepherds must have saluted the Mother of their Saviour! Mary, on her part, rewarded this act of respect by presenting to their entranced vision her divine Child for their adoration. Presuming that a Saviour of the world, born in a stable, must be poor, these poor men had thoughtfully brought out of their own scanty store some trifling gifts for His acceptance.

Mary receives these hearty offerings, and through her will they be presented to the Saviour. Here, Christian reader, you may discover and admire the sublime position that the Blessed Virgin assumes and holds in all ages with regard to humanity. Through Mary do we succeed in reaching Jesus Christ. Through her does Jesus give us Himself and His graces. All acts of sacrifice and of homage are most pleasing to her Son, when presented by us through Mary.

These shepherds were also the first apostles of Christ; for they announced His miraculous birth and the supernatural glory of His Mother. What remorse of conscience must have troubled the inhabitants of Bethlehem, when they remembered with chagrin the unkind treatment they had given but yesterday to this wonderful mother of a most extraordinary child! Happy is the man who with a clear, guiltless conscience can joyfully receive the tidings of the coming of a just God!

MARY PONDERS THE WORDS IN HER OWN HEART.

"But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart." (Luke ii. 19.) The shepherds, as we may easily suppose, related to the blessed Mother the miraculous apparition of the angels and the words spoken and sung by them. When the pious men had left the stable, and it had once more assumed its quiet and lonely

aspect within its grotto walls, she turned over and over again in her agitated heart all that she had seen and heard, and compared it with the mysterious favors which she herself had received through her Son. The angels' tidings of great joy reminded her very forcibly of the message which the great archangel had delivered to her nine months before. Joyfully, yet peacefully, her very heart re-echoed, over and over again, the beautiful song of the angels: "Glory be to God on high and on earth peace to men of good will." This glory for God and this peace for men was entrusted to her motherly keeping. Often and often did she offer her dear child up to the Lord, for His greater glory and for man's increased peace and happiness. Oh, how elevating it was to her tender maternal heart to know, in all her poverty and desolation, that heaven itself with all its inhabitants was rejoicing because of this poor child now lying helpless in the manger! But with her usual reticence she prudently kept all these words in her heart. She did not talk with the shepherds in regard to the mysteries of her high privilege. In her humility she kept back whatever redounded to her own glory.

THE ANGELS AT THE BIRTH.

To every Christian mind it is evident that there must have been a deep meaning in the joyousness of the holy angels at the birth of Christ. To be sure, at the birth of every child the angels participate in the rejoicing. Christian mother, you yourself have a holy guardian angel who is ever near you, especially in the hour of need and sorrow. In such times, a guardian spirit, sent from God, descends from the heights of heaven to the very cradle in which your infant will soon be laid. Are not your own and your child's angels both witnesses of, and

sharers in, thy maternal happiness? Do they not join you in singing the praises of the Creator of this fresh young soul? Is it not a quieting and comforting thought to your tender, anxious, maternal solicitude, that besides the eye of God, the eye of such an angel watches over your darling? But, also, Christian mother, is it not your sacred duty often to thank this guardian spirit from heaven, most fervently, and in your own and your child's name, for his loving and powerful care and protection? Is it not your duty to call your child's attention to this sacred guardianship, to teach it to love and revere its holy guardian angel, and to regard him as the untiring, heavenly, and pure witness of all its thoughts, words, and works?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARY AND JOSEPH HAVE THE CHILD CIRCUMCISED AND NAMED JESUS.

MARY'S MATERNAL SOLICITUDE.

THE eleventh verse of the second chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel seems to indicate that the Holy Family, within a few days after the birth of Christ, removed from the grotto in the rocks and took up their abode in a more fitting dwelling. The Evangelist speaks of the three Wise Men as "entering into the house." Nevertheless, it is the united opinion of by far the greater number of the Church Fathers and other writers of the earliest centuries, that the stable already selected by Providence as the birthplace of Jesus continued for some time longer to be the home of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and that several important events transpired beneath its humble roof before they left it. It is likely, too, that the kindly

shepherds and other friendly neighbors from Bethlehem had meanwhile rendered the place more habitable.

No mother on earth, however tender in feeling, can describe the love, attention, respect, and veneration which the blessed virgin Mother lavished upon her beloved child from the day of His birth. For if every ordinary mother tends her child with affection and pleasure, how must the tenderest of all mothers have cared for her child, who was also her God and her Creator. Besides, her Son was the fairest, comeliest, most perfect in body, mind, and soul of all the children of men. Most assuredly, Christian reader, those days of tranquil and retired domestic life in the poor stable were for Mary days full of joyous care and employment. But, alas, how rapidly they have flown by! How soon were pains, tears, and even blood, to lend to this abode of motherly joys a still more sacred character!

OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD.

"And after eight days were accomplished that the Child should be circumcised, His name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel, before He was conceived in the womb." (Luke ii. 21.)

Circumcision was a religious ordinance instituted by God Himself, by virtue of which each Israelite was incorporated into the community of God's people, and made admissible to the enjoyment of all his individual rights and privileges. The process of admission into the holy covenant was attended with much pain, for a wound was inflicted upon the person admitted, as a sign of reconciliation and satisfaction. The troubled Mother of Jesus knew well that her child, being the Son of the living God, was not amenable to any law, especially the Jewish; and least of all to a law bearing an atoning or purifying character. And oh, how gladly would this tender Virgin have had her divine Child

exempted and spared from this painful and humiliating process of circumcision! But nothing short of a special message from heaven would have induced her to shirk the sacrifice for herself and Him. The Redeemer of mankind wished to subject Himself to the law, "that He might redeem them who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons," as St. Paul tells us in the fourth chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians. Usually five special reasons are alleged to explain why the sinless Son of the sinless Virgin was pleased to comply with this ordinance. First, in order to prove His true humanity, and thus defeat future heresies on this point, especially that of the Manichees, who denied that Christ was man; secondly, in order to sanction this divinely appointed Jewish rite; thirdly, in order to establish his legitimate descent from Abraham; fourthly, in order to escape the usual reproach of the Jews, that He was uncircumcised. which was a great disgrace in their estimation; fifthly, out of humble obedience to the Mosaic law.

The blessed Mother foresaw in spirit the eternal decree ordering, or at least permitting, the countless series of pains and afflictions that was to begin with the pain of circumcision. By anticipation she already felt his pains, united herself therewith, and bravely repeated her resolute fiat, "Be it done."

She, who at a later day will have the courage to stand undaunted beneath the bloody cross of her dying Son, has now the strength to offer that same Son to the knife of circumcision, out of love for God, in satisfaction for our sins, and in obedience to the holy law. No sooner is the first drop of sacred blood shed, than, in union with the heavenly spirits that are hovering near, she adores it in humble reverence. Christian reader, this first single drop of the most precious blood of the Infant Jesus would have sufficed to redeem you, to redeem a thousand

worlds. But your Saviour wished to pour out on the tree of the cross His last drop of blood for you. Your good Mother was witness to and sympathizing participator in the shedding of the first and last drop of your Saviour's redeeming blood.

THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS.

This is not the place, Christian reader, to speak of the holiness, sweetness, and omnipotence of that holy name of Jesus which, on this painful occasion, Our Saviour received, to the joy and happiness of the whole world. Neither will it be necessary, Christian reader, to exhort you to a confiding love for that name, or to reverential devotion and recourse to it. I will mention here but two circumstances that have a special bearing on our dear Mother Mary. In the first, she it was who bestowed this name on Our Saviour; secondly, she is for us the most sublime example and model, in revering and calling upon that name.

Did not the holy Archangel Gabriel, on Annunciation Day, declare it to be the will of God that "you shall call His name Jesus." Is it to be wondered at then, that she who gave us the Redeemer would also give us the name in which alone we can be saved? With what delight, with what ecstatic love of an ardent mother, with what deep reverence of a saint, did she pronounce the holy name! What sweetness, what fortitude, what holy joy she experienced each time in her heart! Christian reader, do not neglect to invoke now, and for all time, the most holy names of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Invoke them in every necessity, in every danger, in every temptation. Place the years of your life, but more especially your death-hour, under the protection of these saving names.

NEW YEARS IN THE NAMES OF JESUS AND MARY.

The commemoration of this painful incident of the circumcision and of the joyful bestowal of the loving and lovable and gracious name falls, according to our reckoning, on the first day of January, and, consequently, corresponds every year with the celebration of New Year's Day.

Certainly, in the meaning of this festival may be discovered a beautiful figure of the various events in our life, both pleasant and painful, which the incoming year brings to each one of us. It is also a good omen that we, animated by the spirit of the Church, begin this important yearly division of time in the name of Jesus. But, Christian reader, as you have just considered, the Blessed Virgin had a highly important share in the pains and graces attending the circumcision of Jesus. We therefore commemorate also on the first of January not only a feast of Our Lord, but at the same time a festival of the blessed Mother of God. It may also afford you greater joy and greater comfort to celebrate the New Year, not only in the name of Jesus, but at the same time in the name and under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Neglect not to place yourself and all interests under the gracious protection of Mary. For this purpose you may make use of the following prayer:

O ever-blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of my God and Saviour! although I am altogether unworthy to be thy child or servant, I nevertheless choose thee in the presence of my guardian angel and of the whole heavenly court, now at the beginning of the New Year, for my patroness, my intercessor, and my mother. I promise that during this year I shall love thee more and more, serve thee more and more faithfully, and do my utmost that others, too, may love and serve thee. In honor of the precious

blood shed for my sake by thy divine Son, I beseech thee, O Holy Mother of God, that thou wouldst count me in the list of thy special servants and votaries, and adopt me as thy perpetual favorite child.

Merciful and amiable Mother, inclose me in thy maternal heart, have at all times a vigilant watch over me, as I, on my part, shall endeavor to cherish for thee a child-like love and reverence. Never withdraw from me thy help, as I hope never to withdraw my trust from thee.

I offer beforehand, and in anticipation, all my thoughts, words, actions, sorrows, trials, and afflictions, during the year, to thy immaculate heart. I also beseech thee most earnestly that thou wouldst enrich these with thy merits, and thus bring them and all else that I am worth to the ever-adorable Trinity. Amen.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE THREE WISE MEN ARE SUMMONED MIRACULOUSLY TO THE MANGER.

THE STAR.

VERY much as the shepherds were summoned from the plains of Bethlehem, by an angel, to the manger, there not only to adore the new-born God and Saviour, but also to honor His Mother, and through her hands to offer their gifts, and through her hands, too, to obtain His blessing, so do now wealthy and powerful Kings come from distant Eastern lands to do homage to the new-born King of the Jews, and to venerate His royal Mother.

There dwelt in Arabia, at that time, certain wealthy priest-kings who with great success devoted themselves, their time, and their talent to the study of the heavenly

bodies. Their souls teemed with earnest and sincere desire for the coming of a Redeemer from heaven, concerning whose advent there was an indefinite knowledge derived from the traditions of the heathen nations.

As, on Christmas night, these learned royal priests were watching and studying, in patient loneliness on the confines of the Arabian desert, the wonders of the starry heavens, they discovered a bright peculiar star, never before observed by any astronomer. At the same time an inward voice prompted them, saying, that this must be the long-expected sign of the great Ruler in Judea, and that He must be at last born into the world. The more brightly the light from this star shone upon their vision the more clearly did the light of divine revelation penetrate their hearts, and awaken in their souls the fire of faith. Animated with such faith, three of these men bravely issued to their numerous attendants orders to prepare for a journey. Sympathizing with the eager haste of their royal riders, the very camels sped hastily over the sandy highways. Before them moved steadily in its course, the strange star, guiding them, as did the pillar of cloud guide the flying Israelites through the desert and over the Red Sea, when escaping from the bondage of Egypt. This star was not governed by the laws that govern the other heavenly bodies. High in heaven, away it sailed towards the West, keeping ahead of the caravan. Now it stood still over the spot where the travellers encamped for the night, seeming as it were suspended in the moving clouds. In the morning it advanced again towards Jerusalem. At last, after a hurried and wearisome journey of twelve days, the Magi descried from the barren and wild hills of Judea in the distance the glistening towers and gleaming roofs of the Holy City. As they passed through the stately gate of the proud metropolis, they wondered exceedingly to find the place

wearing its usual air of every day business-life. Gloomy, silent, joyless, inhospitable, instead of bristling with the signs of rejoicing at the birth of a new Prince. Their perplexity was increased by the sudden disappearance from sight of their hitherto faithful companion, the star. Yet their heaven-inspired zeal did not grow faint. But where were they to look for the King's Son, if not in the King's city? They proceeded, therefore, through the spacious streets, till they came to the royal residence of King Herod. The people of the city looked out of their windows at this novel sight, wondering innocently what it could be; or they followed the procession from street to street, discussing the meaning and object of a display, the like of which had not been seen in their city within the recollection of their oldest inhabitant, and more especially since the universally despised and detested Herod had ascended the throne. How humiliating and discreditable for a people whose whole history was but one continued preparation for the Messias, that foreigners, and pagans at that, should be the first to bring to the "Chosen People" the tidings announcing the actual birth of their great King and Saviour.

THE WISE MEN BEFORE HEROD.

Herod received his distinguished guests with hypocritical signs of friendship, but was at once overwhelmed with astonishment and dread at their direct inquiry: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and are come to adore Him." (Matt. ii. 2.) On hearing these words, Herod had good reason to be alarmed. For he himself was but a usurper, owing his very life to the presence of Roman soldiers. Both himself and his foreign defenders were detested most cordially by the conquered Jews, and he knew that it was only for

want of opportunity that the inhabitants of the city did not rise in rebellion against him. Now he feared this movement on the part of the discontented people. These, too, on their part, especially the better portion, were alarmed, for they feared the well-known violence and cruelty of their foreign ruler, and dreaded a cruel and vindictive war. How remarkable, Christian reader! to the pious shepherds, the angels announced the birth of Christ as a great joy; to Herod and his court and others it becomes a terror. But what anxiety and terror of soul will the second coming of the Son of God produce among all such Herod-like sinners, when the eternal Judge will come with great power and majesty to judge the living and the dead!

Herod was unable of himself to answer the question put by the three kings; he therefore assembled the chief priests, the scribes, and other learned men, and inquired of them where Christ was to be born.

The law-interpreters unfolded the manuscript books, sought out the well-known place in the prophecies of Micheas, and answered the impatient and troubled Herod: "In Bethlehem shall the Anointed of the Lord be born, for so it stands written in the prophecy of Micheas": "And thou Bethlehem art a little one among the thousands of Juda, out of thee shall He come forth that is to be the ruler in Israel." (Mich. v. 2.) The Scriptural scholars understood how to point out to others the way to salvation, but they followed it not themselves, preferring to remain where and what they are, in their cold, proud unbelief.

Herod then, anxious and suspicious, calls the three kings to his presence, inquires carefully about the mysterious star, more especially about the exact time of its appearance; for he presumed and reasoned that the appearance of this star must have been contemporary with

the birth of this new King. Having thus obtained and treasured up all possible information, he dismissed the pious princes on their way to Bethlehem, begging them, with hypocritical zeal, to search diligently after the Child, and on their return to bring up the necessary information, in order that he, too, might then go to pay his respects. He also gave orders that messengers or guides should attend them, in order to avert the suspicion of the Wise Men and to make their return more certain.

Unsuspecting and trusting in God, the three pious kings again set out on their journey towards the royal "City of David," which lay about two leagues distant from Jerusalem. No sooner had they passed the gates of Jerusalem, than a great joy came upon their noble souls; for the star that had been their faithful companion from the time of their leaving home till it disappeared when they entered Jerusalem, now came forth from its cloudy eclipse. Its welcome light seemed to infuse into their hearts a renewed zeal and unbounded reverence for the new-born King; for, as they themselves reasoned, He indeed must be the Son of God, rather than a mere man, to have been announced in this miraculous way.

ADORATION AND OFFERINGS.

In high expectation and with beating hearts they entered Bethlehem, where the star stood still over the poor dwelling of the Holy Family. Not at all disappointed, though very much astonished at the poverty of the place, they entered and found the child with Mary His Mother. Christian reader, what a remarkable scene! The colder, poorer, more miserable the stable was, the more majestic, elegant, and beautiful appeared the Blessed Virgin to be. There she stood glowing in beauty and virginal modesty, pressing to her bosom, with maternal pride and happiness,

the Creator and Redeemer of the world. Completely overcome at the sight of this indescribable scene, the three kings bowed profoundly to the earth before the Mother of the heavenly King, and then threw themselves on their knees, in order to adore the Son of the poor Virgin. In order, too, to add to this worship of the spirit, a corresponding outward and substantial mark of their sincerity, they presented the gifts that they had brought from their own land. These were not unsuitable for the Saviour of the world, for they consisted of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These significant and typical gifts they laid reverently at the feet of the Blessed Virgin, who received them with humble thanks and laid them aside. These were not gifts without meaning, for the Church Fathers interpret the gold as signifying the kingly dignity; the frankincense meaning the divinity, and the myrrh signifying the humanity of Christ.

Significant gifts, for the gold signifies the charity, the incense signifies prayer, and the myrrh signifies patience in suffering. Thus was fulfilled all that Christ's ancestor, the Royal Psalmist, King David, had foretold: "Before Him the Ethiopians shall fall down. . . . The kings of Tharsis and the islands shall offer presents, the kings of the Arabians and of Saba shall bring gifts. And all kings of the earth shall adore Him: all nations shall serve Him. . . . And He shall live, and to Him shall be given of the gold of Arabia, for Him they shall always adore. (Ps. lxxi. 9–15.)

With what intense gratification was Mary's motherly heart filled, to see herself so highly honored and her Son worshipped and adored. How clearly she now perceived that the Saviour was sent not only to the lost sheep of Israel, but also to the Gentiles.

I, too, most loving Mother, rejoice at the honor that was bestowed upon thee by the Wise Men from the East.

I congratulate thee on the great consolation that thou didst experience in witnessing the adoration and homage which thy beloved Child received from these great men.

In company of these pious Magi, I fall down in humility before thee, I salute thee reverently as the Mother of my God. I implore thy Child that thy holy hands may be stretched out lovingly towards me. Oh, I believe that beloved Child of thine is the almighty King of eternal life! But as I am not able in my poverty to bring the princely gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh, I beseech thee, O holy virgin Mother, to accept all that I have, and all that I am. Accept, instead of gold, all the love of my heart; instead of incense, accept the faculties of my soul; instead of myrrh, accept my poverty and trials. Dearest Mother, accept these small offerings in thy own virginal hands, and offer them with fervid love to thy dear Son. Whatever is wanting in me of devotion and fervor, do thou deign to supply by adding thine own.

THE RETURN TO THE EAST.

The happy and highly privileged three kings, having succeeded in obtaining the sacred object of their desires, decided to rest a few days in Bethlehem after their long and wearisome journey. During these happy days, it became their chief and only pleasure to repair as often as possible to the grotto or stable, in order to renew their salutations to the Infant Jesus, and to hold edifying and useful conversation with His blessed Mother concerning the wonderful truths and admirable works and dispensations of God. Would it not, dear Christian reader, be your wish, would you not be most happy, to have taken part in these visits of the Wise Men to Jesus and Mary? But you are not unacquainted with the beautiful Catholic devotion termed "Visits to the Blessed Sacrament"

Yes, Christian reader, in the tabernacle of your parish church you may find the same Saviour. The perpetual light burning with its quiet glimmer before the altar represents the star that guided the three Wise Men. Here you may visit Him as often and as intimately as you wish. Here you may speak to Him in childlike confidence, as if face to face. Here will your soul be penetrated with tranquil bliss, here you may forget the world and all the struggles of the world. Not far from this altar stands another, the shrine of the Blessed Virgin, adorned with her familiar and comforting image. She will receive you and hear your petitions and present them at the feet of her glorified Son in heaven if you come to her in humility with fervent and persevering prayer.

After several days passed in pious attention to the object of their visit, the three Wise Men resolved to return home. In compliance with their promise to Herod, they intended to pass through Jerusalem in order to bring to the king intelligence concerning the Wonder-Child, and to tell of their own unspeakable happiness in finding Him. But, during the night before their departure, an angel appeard to them in their sleep, warning them not to call at Jerusalem, but to return to their own country by another route. The three kings believed and obeyed the angel without any hesitancy as they had on their way from home obeyed and followed the miraculous star. They arose early next morning, set out, and after a wearisome and dangerous journey reached their homes in safety. They did not neglect to relate and extol to their friends and subjects the miracles of grace and mercy that had been wrought in their favor.

Christian reader, imitate the obedience of these three holy men. When you, in holy confession, have been undergoing reconciliation with God, how often and how

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clearly has an angel's voice spoken to your conscience, how earnestly your confession has spoken to your soul? both voices warning you not to return to Herod, that is to say, to shun every person, to avoid every place, to banish every occasion, dangerous to your soul and conducive to your destruction. Have you always heeded these warnings? Arise, Christian reader, in this very hour lay before your God and before your virginal Mother Mary the solemn promise to break such ties, and to pursue your way steadily, the way of penance and perseverance in virtue, till you reach your eternal home in heaven, where for all eternity you may praise the mercies of God. Amen.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PURIFICATION—CANDLEMAS.

THE FIRST-BORN.

INSTEAD of the three kings, who might have revealed to Herod the dwelling-place of the new-born Wonder-King, came now Jesus Himself to Jerusalem, borne in the arms of His Mother. According to the law of Moses (Lev. xii. 2–8; Ex. xiii. 2) every Jewish mother was obliged, forty days after the birth of a son, to present herself in the Temple, in order, with prayer and sacrifice, to obtain the legal purification. The offerings consisted of a lamb one year old, and a pigeon or turtle-dove in atonement for sin. If the parents were too poor to offer a lamb, two turtle-doves were enough to satisfy the law. If, however, the child was a first-born son, it was dedicated in a special manner to the Lord. For this purpose it was brought to the Temple, offered to the Most High, and then ransomed by the payment of five pieces of silver, unless

the child did not belong to the tribe of Levi. This rite had been instituted by the Lord, in order to perpetuate the remembrance of that awful night just preceding the departure out of Egypt, when the destroying angel put to death all the first-born of the Egyptians, but spared all the first-born of Israel.

As in a previous case, the Blessed Virgin was not compelled by law to subject her child to the rite of circumcision, yet did so out of docile obedience to that religious requirement; so, too, was she by no means required to present herself for legal purification in the Temple. She was purer than the snows on Mount Libanus; and her purity, instead of being tarnished, was preserved and even made brighter and more exalted by her own immaculate conception and by the birth of the Most Holy One. There was still another important circumstance that would seem to excuse her from compliance with this law, at least for the present time. Had she not cause to fear that Herod would discover her child, and, in his jealous resentment, seek His very life? Now she must necessarily bring her child in close and dangerous proximity to the tyrant. Her motherly heart shuddered at the very thought. Yet in this instance, as in all others, she remained steadfast to her principle. If God do not direct otherwise, I follow the customs and laws of my country; for the all-wise God will take care of me.

THE OFFERING AND THE PRIESTESS.

It was early in the morning of February 2d when Mary and Joseph slowly descended the hill on which Bethlehem stood, and turned their steps in the direction of Jerusalem. Each carried an offering. The mother carried her divine Son. St. Joseph a pair of turtle-doves. In due time the lofty towers and gleaming roofs of the Holy City are

perceived. The white pinnacles of the temples seem to shine forth a welcome to the Lord of the Temple who in the feeble and humble form of an infant on His Mother's breast comes to take possession of His sanctuary. In the courts of this same Temple Mary had passed twelve happy years. Here she had made her vow of perpetual virginity, and now she comes a mother and yet a virgin—a virginal Mother of Jesus Christ.

Timidly, gently, yet surrounded by choirs of invisible angels, the holy Mother, side by side with her protecting spouse, St. Joseph, entered the city of Jerusalem, and passed near Herod's palace. They passed up the steps on the southern side of the Temple, and went in by door "for the first-born," to the inner court before the gates of the "Tabernacle of Manifestation," where the purification was usually administered. Near the eastern entrance to the Temple, or Nikanor's gate, she took her stand, and soon, as a mother in Israel, was sprinkled with blood by the duly authorized priest. Then with timid meekness she presented her humble offering, consisting of two turtle-doves. Here also took place the presentation of the Child Jesus. He was held up between two lighted tapers, and thus figuratively was offered as a "burnt offering." It was in allusion to this ceremony of burning lights that the venerable Simeon called the Saviour "a light for the enlightenment of the Gentiles." Hence, too, is derived the word "candlemas," by which the Feast of the Purification is often designated.

Christian reader, what an oblation, and what a priestess! When the second temple was built, the elders of the people raised their hands and their voices and wept because its splendor, great as it was, was not equal to the splendor of the old temple. But that old temple never witnessed such a day as this, that had dawned now on this temple built by Herod. Never had its stately walls witnessed

a victim so perfect, so pleasing to the eternal Father. Never had it such a high-priest, as it has to-day a priestess, now that Mary stands beneath its roof and offers up her precious oblation, with pure and immaculate hands. Very truthfully the illustrious Bishop Bossuet says of this event: "If the Jews understood, in a spiritual sense, what they outwardly solemnized, so much the more perfectly did the Blessed Virgin perform this ceremony in spirit when she held the Redeemer in her arms and offered Him up to the eternal Father with her own hands, and united her intention with all that this figurative ceremony represented. That is to say, she offered up the divine Redeemer, a victim for the whole human race, which was graciously redeemed by His death. And as on the day of Annunciation, Mary gave her concurrence to the Incarnation of God, so to-day she wills and submits to the duty of suffering a sacrificial death, for this day was a figure of it and the first preparation." The Holy Mother of God was soon to know, by actual experience, the part that she was to act in the life of sacrifice and the death of sacrifice.

THE FIRST THRUST IN THE MOTHER'S HEART.

"And behold there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was in him. And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. And he came by the Spirit into the Temple. And when His parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law. He also took him into his arms, and blessed God, and said: Now thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace: Because my eyes have

seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples. A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke ii. 25–32.)

What a remarkable personage this aged and venerable Simeon seems to be! How admirable God's dispensations in regard to him! How grandly he speaks out the joy and gratitude of his priestly heart, whose ardent longings are now at last satisfied! Mary, too, on her side, praises and thanks the Lord for this new miracle. It was pleasant for her to hear the significant prophecy, that her Son was to be a light for the revelation of the Gentiles.

Then the gray-haired prophet turned to Mary herself, the progenitrix of this "Salvation" of all peoples, and, inspired by the Holy Ghost, he addresses her: "Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts, thoughts may be revealed." (Luke ii. 34, 35.)

Simeon then ceased to speak, but in the soul of the listening mother a mysterious movement was taking place, a working of divine grace, a renewed and augmented sanctification. She was too familiar with the predictions of the prophets, and her heavenly inspired soul enjoyed too clear an insight into the plan of Redemption, not to know that ignominy, sorrow, and pain would be the portion of the Redeemer throughout His earthly career. But, to have this secret subject of her anxious soul, her deep concern for her divine Child's future, thus publicly and solemnly declared by Simeon, was indeed for her a deep wound, a sharp thrust of that seven-edged sword which was to pierce her innocent, true, and loving heart. In spirit, she looked out on that boundless surging sea of troubles, pain, and death, on which her Son was to be tossed about, and she was willing to be swallowed up in its bitter waters. The bright and loving eyes with which

her Child looked up into her gentle face seemed to shed tears of blood. The little hands that He playfully stretched towards her seemed to her tearful eyes to be already pierced by the nails. Her affliction would have been hardly more intense were the death-sentence of her Son to be there and then pronounced and put in execution. But, alas! the sorrow was to be so soon over. For two-and-thirty long years and more she was to witness in spirit, and in the depths of her heart the sufferings of Good Friday. What a sorrow, what affliction, what an enduring trial for such a tender mother!

Mary, Mother of sorrows! Most sincerely do I sympathize with thy grieving heart. Oh, that I could be permitted to share thy affliction! But, at least I may be allowed to thank thee with all the powers of my heart and soul for the heroic fortitude, the equanimity, and the resignation with which, for love of us sinful men, thou didst carry in thy holy soul, for so many long years, that seven-fold sword of anguish. Behold, dearest Mother, I lay bare to thee my sin-stained soul; pierce it with the sword of a sincere, bitter contrition in order that I may sorrow with thee, and shun evermore those sins of mine that are the cause of thy sorrow. I beseech thee, best of mothers, that thou wouldst offer to the heavenly Father, the bleeding wounds of thy agonized heart, and through them obtain for me a God-pleasing contrition for my sins. And when the arrow of death shall pierce my soul, let me not die till I shall have been reconciled with God, by a sincere sorrow for my misspent life and by a worthy and profitable reception of the holy Viaticum.

THE PROPHETESS ANNA.

Simeon was not to be the only one to enjoy the privilege of greeting the Saviour on His first appearance in the

Temple. Other eyes were to be gladdened by the "Light of the world."

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was far advanced in years, and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity. And she was a widow until fourscore and four years: who departed not from the Temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day. Now she at the same hour coming in, confessed to the Lord: and spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel." (Luke ii. 36–38.)

Anna had been, as has been already stated, the preceptress and friend of the Blessed Virgin during her twelve years' sojourn in the Temple. Together they had loved and served God, together they had yearned and prayed for the coming of the Redeemer. In reward now for that love and devotedness to God, in reward for her motherly solicitude, love, and care for Mary in her tender years, an all-kind and merciful God was pleased to grant her in her declining years the happiness of beholding and adoring the long-desired Redeemer. But this gracious privilege was granted also as a reward from heaven for her continency, fastings, and prayers.

Christian reader, it cannot have escaped your serious observation that in the persons of Simeon and Anna pious old age has been in a special manner honored and privileged. Follow then with strict observance this divine example. Always have a respect for gray hairs. Bear patiently the odd whims of the aged and feeble; for old age is in itself an infirmity that brings with it many severe trials. If Providence has seen fit to leave in your charge a gray-haired father or an aged mother, then cherish, love, and honor this treasure of heaven. Thank God daily for the grace and privilege of being able to serve and defend this representative of God. Not only for eternity

will God be willing to reward your fidelity to father and mother, as if you had done it to Himself, but even in this world will He grant to yourself a happy and honored old age.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MARY AND JOSEPH FLY WITH THEIR CHILD INTO EGYPT.

WEEPING AND WAILING IN BETHLEHEM.

SIMEON'S prophecy, that the Saviour would be for the fall of many and that a sword would pierce the heart of His blessed Mother, was very soon to be verified.

Hardly had the Holy Family returned to Bethlehem from their holy pilgrimage to the Temple, when they were again compelled to grasp the pilgrim's staff and go forth into lengthened exile.

With uneasy anxiety, Herod had awaited for some time the return of the three Wise Men from Bethlehem. But as they did not come back, he began to hope that they had been unable to find any new-born Prince, and were ashamed to appear again in Jerusalem. Perhaps, with his cool, calculating cruelty, he desired to postpone his murderous scheme until after the completion of the royal census of the inhabitants, in order that he might have a better knowledge of the numbers, names, and homes of his victims, and so make his plans more complete and successful. Anyhow, Providence so directed events that the tyrant did not give his final orders for the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem, until the Blessed Virgin and her child had complied in safety with all the

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requirements of the law in the Temple at Jerusalem and had reached again their quiet home. But by this time rumors began to go abroad about the late events and finally reached the foot of the throne itself. It was told that the Messias had been publicly recognized and announced in the Temple by the heaven-inspired Simeon and the venerable and respected Anna.

"Then Herod perceiving that he was deluded by the Wise Men, was exceeding angry, and sending killed all the men-children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the Wise Men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the prophet, saying: A voice in Rama [that is to say on the hill on which Bethlehem stood] was heard, lamentation and great mourning: Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." (Matt. ii. 16–18.)

Spare me, Christian reader, the sad task of describing to you the scene and incidents of this cruel proceeding, this scene of wild consternation amid the mothers of Bethlehem, when they beheld their innocent offspring butchered by Herod's soldiers. In humble silence let us adore the unfathomable designs, and the inscrutable decrees of God, whereby it has come to pass that innocent children should be the first to be put to death for sake of Him who out of love for us became Himself a helpless child. But even in the midst of this cruel act God's goodness is not hidden from view. These innocent children have for nigh two thousand years enjoyed the delights of Paradise, and the honor and homage of men on earth. Had they not died in the years of their innocence, what might they not have become had they grown up amid the wickedness of those times! Perhaps they might have been of the number of those who rejected

Christ, who persecuted Him and put Him to death. Very truly and fittingly does that son of St. Benedict, the venerable Bede, say: "In the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem, the precious death of all the martyrs of Christ is foreshadowed. They died as children: only the humility of children attains to glory. They were put to death in Bethlehem, where that Church took its rise, in which and with which alone her faithful can suffer meritoriously. The arm of the persecutor reached all the children, the Child Jesus alone excepted. So, too, the power of persecutors can reach only the bodies of the martyrs, but Christ cannot be taken from them. They belong to Him and He to them."

For you, Christian mothers, this slaughter of the babes of Bethlehem ought to afford an instructive lesson, so that you may not offend God by immoderate grief, and rebellious complaints, when He is pleased to call home to heaven the child that He has lent to you. Surely you ought to comfort yourself with the assurance that your dear departed child is a happy angel before the throne of heaven. Would you by your unreasonable grief mar or destroy its happiness in heaven? And if your child had lived longer, what would it become in this wicked world?

THE SECOND PLUNGE OF THE SWORD IN MARY'S HEART.

But where is our Infant Jesus, and where His terrified Mother during these dreadful days in Bethlehem? The unfailing star of Providence still shines above the stable at Bethlehem.

Before the death-warrant of the children could be made out, signed, and promulgated by Herod, "behold an Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying: Arise, and take the child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to

pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy Him. Who arose, and took the child and His Mother by night and retired into Egypt." (Matt. ii. 13, 14.)

Christian reader, in these few and simple words of the Holy Gospel is contained a long and harrowing history of sorrow and trial.

Just as the angel, about a year previous, had appeared to St. Joseph bringing the glad and welcome order that he should without any fear take Mary to himself, so now does he appear, but with a message of terror, and ordering an immediate flight. Both of these angelic instructions the gentle patriarch obeyed with the same alacrity and equanimity of soul. The Mother of God, on her part, manifested no undue perplexity or discontent. She hastily gathered together a few necessaries for the journey, while St. Joseph saddled the beast of burden. Then taking in her arms the angelic Babe, and pressing Him to her throbbing heart, the holy pilgrims go forth into the cold, starry night, away to a foreign land, through the trackless desert, and into a heathen country.

Christian reader, do not forget the fact that the fulness of grace in Mary's soul did not extinguish her natural affections. On the contrary, grace intensified these feelings in her pure and tender bosom. But what natural feeling overruled all others during this perilous journey of the Virgin? Fear, a crushing fear, for the life of her Child; a dread of the unknown future, of the unknown land, of unseen dangers, of the Arabs loitering in the mountain-passes, of probable pursuit by Herod's soldiers to take her child and slay it. Holy Scripture is silent with regard to the various incidents undergone by the Holy Family during this painful and lonely journey into exile, but pious legend has adorned it with a charming coloring of varied scene and incident. Among other things, it relates that a lofty palm-tree laden with ripe

dates lowered its branches in order to place its fruit within the reach of the tired and famished Virgin. It tells how two angels ferried the Holy Family across a lake in a little boat during a severe gale of wind and rain. Can we refuse to believe that holy angels accompanied and defended the holy travellers during their entire journey.

At last they crossed the boundary line of their own country, and came to the edge of the immense dismal desert they were obliged to traverse before they would reach the confines of Egypt. What they here endured cannot be described in words. After leaving the town of Gaza, the travellers saw nothing before or around them but immense plains of dry and blinding sand, ankle-deep, made hot and parching by the scorching winds blowing from the south. Not a spring of sweet water was to be found, no spot of fresh verdure, no place to rest, or seek refuge from the dazzling rays of the sun. To their bodily inconveniences were added an invincible dread and anxiety of soul. It would have been overpowering for Mary and Joseph, if in the moments of most distressing need, the divine Child did not temporarily lay aside the veilings of His human weakness, and manifest His power as the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth.

IN EXILE.

After a journey of about one hundred and forty miles, the holy refugees reached Heliopolis, or the City of the Sun, which was the birthplace of Moses. Here there was a considerable colony of Jews, with a temple dedicated to Jehovah, that had been built by Onias, after the plan of the Temple at Jerusalem. A reliable writer of Church history, Sozomenus, who lived in the first ages of Christianity, relates ("History" v. 21) that

the false gods in one of the chief pagan temples of Heliopolis were cast down from their pedestals and broken to pieces the moment that the true Son of the living God passed the gates of the city." This we may easily believe, when we remember that the idol of Dagon was cast down and shattered on the ground, losing its head and arms, at the approach of the mere material Ark of the Covenant. This last fact is given in Holy Scripture in the First Book of Kings. The Prophet Isaias foretold these occurrences in Egypt, when he made use of the following words: "Behold the Lord will ascend upon a swift cloud, and will enter into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence." (Is. xix. 1.) Yet it was not in Heliopolis, the handsome city of mysterious Egypt, that the holy exiles resolved to take up their abode. According to the unanimous opinion of the earliest writers they decided to sojourn in Matarea, or City of Sweet Waters; so called because it contained the only fountain in all Egypt of cool and wholesome drinking-water. It was a small quiet village, buried in a grove of fig-trees, and reminded our pilgrims of their native Nazareth.

But how is the Holy Family to procure a subsistence in a land where the inhabitants despise foreigners, and refuse to afford them either employment or alms, as long as they can find natives of their own country to give employment to. In Nazareth, the immaculate daughter of heaven had already led a life of humble toil, but then she did not suffer from the sleepless nights, anxious days, and constant privations that invariably attend poverty and exile. Alas, how dear is bread among strangers! often she sat up the whole night at work, endeavoring to procure the necessaries of life, to supply which the wages of St. Joseph were not adequate. As she knew how to embroider and sew, with elegant skill, the finest and most

costly materials, for she had learned these branches when at school in the Temple, she was employed by several of the first ladies of Heliopolis. Yet it may have often happened that the Saviour-Boy needed bread when the grieved Mother had nothing to offer Him but tears.

The Blessed Virgin understood how to make use of her presence and that of her Son in Egypt to lessen and discredit the worship of idols, and to advance the conversion of her pagan neighbors. As she was gentle, friendly, and charitable, she soon won the confidence of the women of Matarea and Heliopolis. The Mother of Eternal Wisdom availed herself of every opportunity to speak to them of the remarkable signs of the times, such as the deficiency of the pagan gods, and the fall of the idols in the pagan temples. Her words sank deeply into their hardened hearts, and not a few of her best-disposed neighbors promised to renounce these false gods and to have recourse to the one true God of the Chosen People. Soon, Christian reader, history was able to show us Egypt, especially the solitudes of Thebais, peopled with a race of saints. Thousands of men left their families, their earthly possessions, their positions of honor, and the conveniences and comforts of life, and, going into these deserts of Egypt, gave themselves up to lives of severest penance and unceasing prayer and praise. Such were St. Paul, St. Anthony, and St. Pachomius, whose sanctity has been a theme of admiration in all ages of the Church, down ever to the present day. Verily, virtue throve the most vigorously and fruitfully in the soil consecrated by the footsteps of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

THE RETURN TO FATHERLAND.

The length of time passed by the Holy Family in Egypt those versed in antiquities fail to state. Writers on this

subject differ very much, some saying one year, others seven. The last has been adopted as the most probable length of their stay by so reliable an authority as St. Thomas Aquinas.

Mary and Joseph cherished in their unwavering hearts the certain conviction that the same Providence who had ordered them to that country by His angel would in a similar manner tell them when to return home. With what unspeakable longing they awaited this much-desired message from heaven! How often, when overcome with a desire for home, friends, and neighbors, did the Blessed Virgin, amid her toils and privations, make use of the words of David, her royal ancestor: "Wo is me that my sojourning is prolonged; I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Cedar [that is to say, amid the plundering tribes of Arabia], my soul hath been long a sojourner." (Ps. cxix. 5.)

"But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, Saying: Arise and take the child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead that sought the life of the child. Who arose, and took the child and His Mother, and came into the land of Israel. But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither: and being warned in sleep, retired into the quarters of Galilee. And coming he dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was said by the prophets: That He shall be called a Nazarite." (Matt. ii. 19–23.)

Consider here, Christian reader, with what steady solicitude the eye of God watched over the severely tried Holy Family, and just at the proper moment notified them to return home. Over you, too, dear reader, does His fatherly eye keep constant watch; to you in your trouble He says: "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to

have pity on the son of her womb? and if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold I have graven thee in My hands." (Is. xlix. 15, 16.)

Consider, further, the celerity and cheerfulness with which Mary and Joseph left their place of exile, and hastened homeward. Christian reader, do not we also, banished children of Eve, live in a valley of tears? Is there not awaiting us in heaven a happy, everlasting home? Yet, do we not live here as if we owned on earth mansions that would last for eternity? How little desire in our hearts for spiritual everlasting good!

Consider, in the third place, the prudent foresight with which St. Joseph, in harmony with his careful spouse, endeavored to guard against new dangers at home, and therefore resolved to repair to the quiet town of Nazareth in despised Galilee, instead of exposing again his chaste spouse and his divine Foster-Child and himself to Herod's vindictive anger. Yet you, Christian reader, how often you expose carelessly your most precious treasures, your faith, your innocence, your piety, heaven itself to every risk!

Consider, lastly, the shocking death of Herod. His last sickness was frightfully disgusting. But more dreadful still the agony and despair of his soul. At one time, devils swarmed about his bed, then he imagined that he saw the souls of the slaughtered Innocents of Bethlehem, and the souls of his own sons who had been slain by his orders. His agonizing despair was so intense that his attendants barely succeeded, after the utmost watchfulness, in preventing him from destroying the little life that was left in him. So does it always happen to the persecutors of Christ and the enemies of His Church. Throughout the long length of many centuries countless Herods have arisen who, with all the appliances of power and falsehood have sought to take away the life of Christ and His Church,

But soon came the angel of justice with the tidings: "They are dead who sought the life." Generally they were "dead" of a frightful death. The Church of Christ, meanwhile, pursues the even tenor of her way; always ancient, ever young; enriched with constantly increasing power, glory, and merit; always overcoming her enemies. Christian reader, be not despondent at the present persecutions. They will soon pass away from earth who have persecuted her. The Church itself, however, will never be overcome by the gates of hell.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JESUS WHEN TWELVE YEARS OLD IS SOUGHT BY HIS PARENTS AND FOUND IN THE TEMPLE.

THE SACREDNESS OF A RETIRED LIFE.

HOW gladly, Christian reader, would I speak to you about the youth, growth, and amiable deportment of the boy Saviour, Jesus Christ; and how pleasant and profitable would such a recital be for writer and reader. But we are not writing a life of Christ, only a life of the Blessed Virgin, His Mother. Hence only the merest, briefest mention can be made of such circumstances, events, and words as are identified with the history of our ever-blessed Lady.

When the Holy Family, after several years of absence, came back to Nazareth, there was great rejoicing among the kinsfolk and acquaintances. These, though glad to welcome among themselves once more the kindly and patriarchal Joseph, and the gentle, modest Mary, were more especially charmed with the amiable, fair, and comely Boy

who accompanied the wayfarers. The good neighbors, who believed Jesus to be the Son of Joseph, were unceasing in their praises and congratulations. During their absence in Egypt, Joseph's simple cottage on the side of the hill had become dilapidated, and all the former signs of the industry, economy, and neatness of Mary's management, both within and without, had completely disappeared. Even the few trifling effects left behind in their sudden departure for Egypt had fallen to pieces or been carried away. They had left poverty behind them in Egypt, only to find it again in Nazareth. But the mere thought of being permitted to labor and care for the divine Treasure of heaven inspired the now aged and feeble Joseph with renewed youth and vigor, and incited the blessed Mother to renewed assiduity and industry. The blessing of God was abundant and effective within their little circle. Thus they soon succeeded in making their little house habitable, and in procuring means to obtain the necessaries of life.

But the Sun of this renewed domestic life was their Child Jesus who had also been their bright and cheering sunlight in the Egyptian darkness of their banishment. He was always the Sunlight of Mary's heart. All the countless, nameless joys that the Blessed Virgin in her youth had afforded to her saintly mother St. Anne now became her own through her amiable and loving Son, to remain with her forever. What a heavenly delight for Mary's tender, loving soul, when the Lord and future Judge of heaven and earth hung upon the neck of His creature! What joy when He took His first step alone; when she discovered traces of her own features in the boyish countenance of the God-Man, and saw them more and more plainly developing from day to day! How sweet to hear Him lisp for the first time, the dear word, "Mother"! In her heart, motherly love and humble

adoration were mingled in the most admirable manner. So too were childish simplicity and weakness united to divine attributes in the person of her Son. This fact is expressed by the Evangelist in the few expressive and significant words: "The child grew and waxed strong, full of wisdom: and the grace of God was in Him." (Luke ii. 40.)

THE PILGRIMAGE.

But this happy and tranquil state of domestic life was soon disturbed and embittered by a drop of anguish. Three times in the year, on the feasts of Easter, Pentecost, and the Tabernacles, were the men of Israel obliged to make a pilgrimage to the city containing the Ark of the Covenant, which since King David's time had rested within the walls of Jerusalem. (Ex. xxxiv. 23.) Women were not required to make this visit to the Temple, yet the most pious among them, and of course Mary, made it voluntarily out of devotion. Thus the Evangelist could with truth write of Mary and Joseph, that they went up every year to the festival of the Pasch at Jerusalem. This was no small sacrifice, especially on the part of the delicate Virgin, for the distance was more than thirty leagues. Every boy in Israel, on reaching his twelfth year, was by law declared to be "of age." He emerged from childhood and, to some extent, from his parents' guardianship, and was admitted as a sufficiently grown and matured member of the Israelite community. He was also now obliged to perform all religious exercises.

As the eternal Son of the heavenly Father out of humility and obedience wished to be considered the Son of Joseph, and also to comply with the laws of Israel, He undertook, at the age of twelve years, to perform the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, in

company with His Mother and His foster-father. Once before, as you remember, Christian reader, had the adorable Saviour-God come to the Temple in Jerusalem. He came from Bethlehem a child of forty days. At that time Simeon's words pierced Mary's soul like a sharp sword. Now the thoughtful Blessed Virgin was meditating on the unspeakable series of wonderful dispensations of graces, of joys, and of sorrows that had been her portion during the past twelve years. Did her warning heart feel a presentiment that now again her soul was to be rent almost in twain by another plunge of Simeon's cruel sword?

The journey was fatiguing, especially for St. Joseph, who was now aged and broken down with hard work, as well also for the delicate Boy, and even for the Blessed Virgin, though in the prime of life, being then about twenty-eight years of age. Yet the hardships of the journey were much lightened by the numerous and pleasant company who joined them, and whose numbers were augmented at every mile. Whether, on occasion of this visit, the Holy Family were able to find suitable lodgings, or whether, on account of the crowds of visitors in Jerusalem, the sad events of Christmas Eve in Bethlehem, were repeated, Holy Scripture does not tell us.

Never, from the beginning of the world, was the Son of God made man so worthily praised in His Temple at Jerusalem as on this Feast of the Passover in the twelfth year of the Christian era. Twelve years previously, to be sure, the same three holy persons were there, but at that time our dear Lord was but a helpless child. To-day He kneels between Mary and Joseph in the Temple, and in union with them adores His heavenly Father. We may well conceive that the angels of heaven broke off their chant of praise and covered their faces with their wings, in presence of the divine Worshipper on earth, as He knelt in prayer between Mary and Joseph.

THE LOST TREASURE.

"And having fulfilled the days, when they returned, the Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and His parents knew it not. And thinking that He was in the company, they came a day's journey, and sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." (Luke ii. 43–44.)

Humanly speaking, it is almost impossible for us to conceive how so prudent and so obedient a Son as was Jesus Christ could thus desert His beloved parents, and plunge them into such great misery and anxiety. Such was the will of God. How again was it possible that such vigilant and careful parents did not sooner discover His absence? Even if we regard the occurrence as a mere accident rather than a special dispensation of God's will, the explanation of it is simple and easy. In these pilgrimages of the Israelites the men and the women usually travelled in separate bands, each sex by themselves. The children were at liberty to travel in either band. Thus it happened that when returning from Jerusalem, Mary supposed her Child was with St. Joseph, while he on the other hand, believed Him to be with Mary. Each journeyed through the whole length of the day happy with the thought of meeting Him at night, when preparing to make their encampment in the tents. How astonished, then, and alarmed they must have been at not finding Him at the expected time and place! On meeting each other, they eagerly asked, "Where is Jesus?" on discovering their mistake, they reproached themselves, but not each other, with their unpardonable negligence in having thus lost sight of their beloved Child. The evening was now far advanced, and the holy couple were tired and hungry after their exhausting day's travel. But neither food nor rest was to be thought of. From door to door, from tent to tent, from neighbor to neighbor the

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afflicted pair hurried to and fro in anxious search of Him whom their souls loved. But all in vain. Then they made a few hasty preparations and hurried back again to Jerusalem. Alas, what a dreadfully distracting way of the cross for the distressed Mother during that whole long night! The most dismal visions rose up before her imagination and well-nigh crushed her bleeding heart. Perhaps, thought she, the successor of Herod, or some of his officers, have at last discovered her child to be the new King of the Jews for whom they have been so long on the watch, and have cruelly murdered Him. Add to that her self-reproach that it was through her own fault that her Son and God had been lost and perhaps put to death. Oh! the flight into Egypt was a triumphal procession compared to this day's journey. Then she could press the Lord of heaven and earth to her bosom. The excess of her present love for her divine Son was equalled now by her grief at His loss. How intensely she loved Jesus! What excellent grounds she had for loving Him, and yet now He was lost to her and to St. Joseph.

THE THIRD THRUST OF THE SWORD IN THE MOTHER'S HEART.

Towards morning the Blessed Virgin and her spouse, weary and hungry, arrived in Jerusalem. But love for Jesus and anxiety in His regard left in her breast no place for peace. She hastened to the house in which they had lodged during the late festival days. No tidings here. She went to all her acquaintances and relatives in every part of Jerusalem, but found no tidings of her lost Son. She even inquired of strangers on the street: no tidings. The stolid indifference and coldness, even rudeness, of some who, without condescending to stop for a moment, gave her for answer an impatient "No," and then hurried

on, wrung her very heart. Some few vouchsafed to bestow a passing look of compassion on the distracted young mother, but no one offered to assist her in her search. "Alas!" said she to herself, "if these people knew who He is that I am seeking all Jerusalem would soon be astir to join in the search, and would not be quieted till we had found Him and carried Him in solemn procession to the Temple, there to proclaim Him as the veritable and accepted and acknowledged Messias and Saviour of our people."

Three long days did Mary pass in this dreadful state of wild anxiety, almost dead with fear and exhaustion. These three days constitute the third dolor of the Mother of God. And where was Jesus during these days, and how was He occupied?

The Temple of Jerusalem, which was the only national sanctuary of the Jews, contained within its precincts several buildings, courts, and halls. In one of these side-halls, the Sanhedrim held its sessions. It was composed of all the scribes, who met to expound the Jewish Law and to solve disputed questions. These meetings were open to all. Next to the seats of the elders were ranged the seats for the learned ones of the land, and for the young men; while the inquiring and eager public stood about in groups. Jesus, the Eternal Wisdom, had taken His place among the learned, who were entitled to propose questions to those versed in Scripture.

May we venture to ask why Jesus, when only a boy of twelve years, was pleased to place Himself between the learned scribes and the people? Christian reader, Jerusalem's sanctuary was the place, above all others, where every genuine and sincere Hebrew heart bounded for joy and holy pride. No other people in the world had such a glorious temple, much less a temple where the Almighty God was so near to every humble worshipper

Jesus Christ was not only a true Israelite but also the Son of God, and as He took His place among these doctors, His heart burned with enthusiasm and grace. He felt that He was in His Father's house, He sympathized and took part in all the passing human events, He wished and felt no other motive than the sacred nearness of His Father, and His own sublime duty, which He had been commissioned by that Father to discharge on earth. Already had a gleam of His divinity appeared more than once among men: at the adoration of the shepherds on Christmas morn, at the mysterious coming of the three Wise Men from the East. At His presentation in the Temple, the prophetic sayings of Simeon and Anna had called the attention of the contemporaries of Christ to the "unknown God" who was dwelling in their midst. But they had eyes and saw not, they had ears and heard not. Hence, the Redeemer Himself came publicly among them, and spoke of the expected coming of the Messias with such heavenly wisdom that "all who heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers." (Luke ii. 47.)

THE FINDING.

By degrees the news spread all over the city of Jerusalem that an unknown youth of marvellous beauty and knowledge had appeared in the lecture hall of the Sanhedrin, and by the depth of His questions and answers was perplexing even the renowned master and doctor Hillel, and filling the whole assembly with amazement. This news finally reached the ears of His Mother, who, though fast losing all hope, was still persistent in her search. At once an inward voice explained to her who this strange, beautiful, and learned boy must be. With St. Joseph she hastened to the Temple. Dear Christian reader, ask me not to describe the scene presented at this

rapturous meeting. Even the holy Evangelist St. Luke shows a desire to avoid intentionally the detailed description of this finding, for he describes the sad desolation during the three days' search, and the transports of the recovery with remarkable brevity in the following simple narrative:

"And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the Temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers. And seeing Him, they wondered. And His Mother said to Him: Son, why hast Thou done so to us? behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. And He said to them: How is it that you sought Me? did you not know, that I must be about My Father's business? But they understood not the word that He said to them." (Luke ii. 46–50.)

Beloved and sorrowing Mother! now that thy grief has been converted into a thrilling joy, permit me to express to thee my sympathizing joy, to congratulate thee on having found thy Son and Saviour. Ah, what a deep sympathy I felt for thee on account of thy great loss! What joyful sentiments I now experience when thou hast found and recovered Him! Now dost thou love thy Son so much the more ardently, by reason of this occurrence. But dear, kind Mother, dost thou not see that I am wandering, and am in great danger of being forever lost? I beg of thee to come in search of me, to seek me with pain, to offer up to the heavenly Father for me and for all stray sheep, thy distress and thy labors during those three painful days. Offer up, too, thy present motherly delight at the finding, in order that we all, lost children that we are, may return to thee in safety: that thou also mayest love us still more fervently for having been lost and for now being found, and mayest more powerfully

protect us; while we may hope to meet each other in the never-ending joys of heaven.

Christian reader, ponder well and study closely the maternal tenderness and solicitude implied in the eager question of Mary to her divine Son, and the divine mystery implied in His remarkable answer: "Son, why hast thou done so to us?" The modest and prudent Virgin does not reproach her Son for having caused her bitter pain and dreadful anxiety. But she cannot understand why He, who had hitherto been all affection, all obedience, who had shown Himself to be the veritable child of Mary and Joseph, had now, so unexpectedly and in this extraordinary manner, shown Himself as the Son of God and as a teacher in Israel without having first notified His earthly parents. She could not understand this apparent neglect and forgetfulness of herself and St. Joseph. Christian reader, how often does the Holy Family, through its boundless and endless patience, address to you the question: "Son, why hast thou done so to us? Have we deserved such coldness, such disloyalty from thee?"

"Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." What a touching manifestation of deep reverential love! Oh, how willingly Jesus permits Himself to be sought out by us, even though we have to seek Him "sorrowing"! How often He hides Himself from our view; concealing from us His graces, His consolations, and His peace; though only apparently, and for the purpose of making us seek Him more ardently because of our very desolation. Christian reader, if in the course of a life of duty and grace and favor, you find yourself overtaken by discouragement, spiritual darkness, anxiety of soul, weakness of faith, hard struggles of soul and spiritual desolation, do not despond; Jesus is hiding Himself from you for a time, in order that you may seek Him. Seek Him, there-

fore, humbly, perseveringly, hopefully, and with a spirit of self-sacrifice. He will permit you to find Him, for He has promised in the words of the Prophet Isaias: "Before they call, I will hear: as they are yet speaking, I will hear." (Is. lxv. 24.)

IN THE CHRISTIAN TEMPLE.

"Did you not know, that I must be about My Father's business?" It is thus that we are able to recognize the Son of God, the Son of Mary; namely, by finding Him taking up His abode in the House of God, and by permitting Himself to be found there. And you, Christian reader, where is your favorite dwelling-place? Where do you love to linger, at least in thought and desire if you cannot be there in person? Do you not find one short half-hour too long and too tedious when assisting at holy Mass? Do you not find it irksome to make a short visit to some hallowed shrine in your church, or even to the Most Adorable Sacrament? while, on the contrary, your hours pass by too swiftly when at the gaming-table, in the drinking-saloon, over the trashy novel, or during an idle and useless visit?

For you especially, Christian parents, in this pilgrimage of Jesus, the Child of twelve years, and also His mysterious disappearance for three days, there is a subject full of useful instruction. The pilgrimage warns you that it is your duty to take your children with you to the house of God, and to explain to them, as soon as their understanding will allow, the sacred mysteries of their religion, the meaning of the ceremonies, the solemn and sanctifying nature of the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and the sacraments.

The mysterious disappearance of the Child Jesus bespeaks to you increased watchfulness and solicitude about

your children—their souls, and their innocence. Alas, Christian parents, how many children are lost just about the age of twelve years! and lost through the fault of negligent parents. It is at about the age of twelve or thirteen that the inclination to sensuality begins to awaken. About that age, a yearning for freedom and a hankering after pleasure spring up in the child's heart. Happy the child who, during this perilous period, is safe under the guardianship of pious parents, and who kneels by their side in prayer in the Christian temple.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JESUS IS SUBJECT TO HIS PARENTS.

HOLY OBEDIENCE.

"AND Jesus, when He was twelve years old, went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and was subject to them. And His Mother kept all these words in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men." (Luke ii. 51, 52.) These few and simple words of St. Luke contain the whole history of Jesus and Mary during a period of full eighteen years. Yet in these same simple words we find a complete and sublime picture of happy, holy, Christian family life.

I have previously mentioned that according to the Jewish law, every Hebrew boy, as soon as he had completed his twelfth year, was considered as of age, and to a certain extent removed from the supervision of his parents. But Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth, subjected Himself at that very age, and for many years

afterwards, in a special manner, to the will of those whom He had chosen as His superiors. He became subject to them: that is to say, He considered Himself as more lowly and of less importance and dignity than Joseph and Mary. He is always subject to them. Oh, consider, Christian reader, the worth of the Lord's lowly handmaid! Consider the holy rivalry and struggle with which they sought to wait upon each other. Consider the motherly love and pious humility with which Mary protested against being served by her Son, who was her God, when He would insist upon bringing wood and water for their simple home! At such time, the Son might remind the mother of the nature of His mission to earth, saying, as He did later to others, "The Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a redemption for many." (Matt. xx. 28.)

That Jesus, during these years of His hidden and unwritten life, actually assisted His foster-father, St. Joseph, in the carpenter trade we learn from an express statement of Holy Scripture. Once during His public life, when Our Lord had come to Nazareth, He went into the synagogue to preach and teach. But the inhabitants of that town, who had known Him in His boyhood, refused to listen to Him, saying, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary." (Mark vi. 3.)

GROWTH OF JESUS.

The growth of Jesus Christ in wisdom, grace, and age was a mysterious and miraculous manifestation that filled the heart of His ever-blessed Mother with unspeakable admiration and heavenly delight. But how could a most perfect, infinite, incomprehensible God and Saviour be said to grow in wisdom and grace? A reasonable question, Christian reader.

We know that our divine Saviour united within Himself two natures in one person: the divine nature and the human nature. Hence, in speaking of Christ, we can predicate of Him a natural and a supernatural existence. As God He could not increase neither in grace nor in wisdom. Nor as man could He in a strict sense increase in grace, for in the human soul of Christ, closely united as it was with the Godhead, from the first moment of its existence there dwelt the entire fulness and completeness of all grace, the very source and origin of grace. But this indwelling fulness and perfection of graces became gradually more and more manifest to the eyes of mortals as He advanced in age and bodily strength. Every word and act of His became more and more edifying as He progressed in years. Then, in regard to the human knowledge of Christ, the doctors of the Church teach that it was threefold. The first kind of knowledge is that which He enjoyed in common with those men who are in the condition of heavenly happiness and glory; namely, those who enjoy the beatific vision of God. The second kind of knowledge was that enjoyed by men on earth, in a state of innocence or sinlessness; namely, the knowledge of all those things that it was decreed for men to know, more especially a deeply penetrating knowledge of that nature over which man was to reign supreme. Finally, His third kind of knowledge was that which He possessed in common with men in their fallen state, namely, the acquired knowledge of varied experience. This last kind of knowledge, and only this, was susceptible of increase or advancement in Christ. More properly speaking, He acquired knowledge or wisdom that already dwelt within Him, but in another way and by other means; namely, by perception and exercise of his bodily faculties.

This miraculous union of the divine and human in Jesus, and His daily amiable development and increase afforded to Mary uninterrupted subjects for ever-recurring and ever-continuing wonder and admiration. Do you not fondly believe, Christian reader, that Mary herself, by virtue of this unceasing contemplation; by her acts of adoration, of service, and devotion, and by prayer, also grew in age, wisdom, and grace in the sight of God and men?

"Mary kept all these words in her heart." This statement of the holy Evangelist bears chiefly upon the answer given to Mary by her Son in the Temple at Jerusalem: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" Certainly, she would never more let these words depart from her memory. She knew indeed the plan of Redemption, at least in its chief and most prominent features. She knew that this absence of three days was but an ominous foreshadowing of another and more protracted absence of her beloved Son during His public ministry. Perhaps, even, she may have known that these three dreadful days were but a figure of those other three days, the three last days of suffering week, or perhaps the three sad and lonely days to be passed in the grave by Jesus after death. And she watched and saw her beloved Son grow up, lovely and divine. When she would contemplate His countenance, and give way to her own reflections, high above the sea of motherly happiness inundating her grateful soul there would appear slowly, but with dreadful reality, a cross dripping with blood standing before the gaze of her troubled soul. As she kept in her heart every word that fell from the lips of her divine Son, so, too, did she keep those words of terror pronounced by the prophet Isaias about that beloved

Son: "He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a thirsty ground; there is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness; and we have seen Him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of Him; despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity (Is. liii. 2, 3).

THE EARTHLY TRINITY.

Well-regulated labor, simple habits of living, mutual love and edification, formed the basis of the unbroken sacred peace that reigned in the home of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph at Nazareth. While St. Joseph and his Foster-Son were in the workshop, or away in some neighboring village at labor, the blessed Mother remained faithfully at home, busily employed keeping everything in good order and cleanliness; or else busying herself in preparing the simple but tasty and wholesome meals for her venerable spouse and her daily growing and thriving Son. To-day is pointed out to the traveller, and it is held in deep veneration, the very fountain from which the sublime Mother of God used to draw water for her household, unless, indeed, her beloved Son, in His obedience and humility, performed this duty Himself. And, oh, how indescribably pleasant were the evenings they passed together! Having finished the duties of the day, they seated themselves about their fireside, and amused and instructed each other in pleasant, useful conversation, while Mary sat busy plying her spinning-wheel, or knitting, or sewing. It would be difficult to discover who was the chief person in authority and dignity in this little community. The highest in dignity was Jesus, yet He was subject to His parents. St. Joseph was the head of the family, but as he was not the father of Jesus, he was second to Mary. Hence the Blessed Virgin was, as it were, the heart of this earthly trinity.

MIRROR OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY.

It cannot have escaped your notice, Christian reader, that the peaceful, God-pleasing family life at Nazareth becomes for you a veritable mirror and model, whether your position in your own family is that of a father, of a mother, of a child, or even of a servant. In either case, you will find in the Holy Family a most admirable model, and an example deserving your imitation and admiration.

St. Joseph was the head of the house. Consider, Christian father, the industry of St. Joseph; contemplate the work of his busy hands, a work sanctified by prayer and good intentions. How fond he is of his little home! Not in idle, noisy dissipation does he find enjoyment, but at home in the midst of his own circle does he seek and find true peace and happiness. Consider his contented modesty. To be a poor tradesman and to be known as such does not disturb his peace of soul. He knows not how to pine after privileges and needs that are above the condition assigned to him by God. Consider his good example, and how eagerly zealous he is to exhibit such good example to the members of his family, as well as to his friends and neighbors in Nazareth. By good example he finds that he can keep his place as head of a family better than by despotic commands and regulations. Holy patron St. Joseph, foster-father of Our Saviour, continue to infuse into the hearts of all Christian fathers the same noble and God-pleasing spirit that pervades thy own peaceful life at Nazareth.

Mary was the mother in the home at Nazareth. Can it be possible that there exists any mother of a Christian family who does not venerate in a special manner the ever-blessed Virgin, or who does not take her and imitate her as an amiable and glorious model. Consider, Christian mother, this virgin Mother in her life of love

of work, of good deeds, of piety. Consider her in her love. It is necessary for a woman to love. Love then your family. Sweeten with gentle love the important duties and hard work of your husband. By the exercise of love, bring up your children to be good men and women.

Consider the virgin Mother in her life of labor. She herself looks after her housekeeping; she herself makes the garments needed by St. Joseph and her divine Child Jesus. Hard work with quiet meditation was her only recreation, her only enjoyment. Therefore, do not consider that your domestic cares and duties are too heavy and laborious for you. Embrace and discharge them out of love for God, and He will help you to bear them and discharge them. Attend to your business with a quiet cheerfulness, and not with murmur or complaint, which latter will deprive yourself of all merit, and those around you of all happiness. Do not seek your happiness and your recreation away from your family and in doubtful public places. At the domestic fireside, in the midst of your own little flock, there you are to look for happiness. If you find it not there, you will seek it in vain in the outer world.

Consider Mary in her life of good deeds. Though the Mother of God was poor, yet she did much for the poor and wretched. Though she had not worldly goods, she had love and compassion for the poor, and found time to help them. Great and widespread is the misery in the world, but glorious and countless are the apostles of the poor and neglected. Christian mothers, endeavor to become such apostles. Though gold and silver be not at your disposal for this purpose, still an inexhaustible wealth of love, sympathy, and time is at your disposal, to be applied by you with tender heart and gentle hand for the suffering darlings of God.

Consider Mary in her life of piety. Love, labor, benevolence! What are these but a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, if the genuine ring of the veritable union with God be not added thereto! Piety was the very sunlight that penetrated and lit up Mary's solitude. It was as incense from heaven, descending upon her and filling her soul with fragrance. There is a proverb, Christian mother, which says: "As the mother, so the family." What is the state of a family if devoid of religious belief, of trusting hope, or of childlike love for God? Therefore, sanctify your daily duties by prayer, frequent the house of God, approach the holy-communion table, kneel before the image of the model wife and mother, the ever-blessed Virgin.

O beloved Mother of God, awake and develop within the hearts of all Christian mothers those glorious virtues that were the ever-enduring ornaments of thy own virgin soul and the honor of thy hidden life: that thus the kingdom of God may be set up in our families to grow and flourish; and that grace and peace may prevail amid our trials and tribulations while journeying through this vale of tears.

Jesus Christ is the Model of those who are subject to obedience. Christian sons and daughters, you especially would I gladly lead into the bosom of the Holy Family at Nazareth. There, in that very sanctuary of piety and peace, would I reverently introduce you to your adorable Model. Look lovingly upon the obedient Jesus. He is very God, yet is subject, till his thirtieth year, to His own creatures; while you foolishly think that because you have laid aside baby clothes and have left school, you ought to be free and independent of all restraint; thereby breaking your parents' hearts and working your own destruction. Look at the humble Jesus. A grand and sublime mission He has to fulfil on earth! How neces-

sary then for Him, according to our intelligent estimation, to go forth into public life, in order to learn among men, how to teach, how to heal, how to comfort, console, and strengthen His fellow-beings. Yet, instead of doing this, He shuts Himself up in the shop of a carpenter. You, on the contrary, often plan out, with great complacency and self-satisfaction, grand schemes for your future. Your father's house is too contracted, your condition in life is too humble, your father's manner of life and mode of business are too old-fashioned for your taste. Do not deceive yourselves, Christian sons and daughters. Do not disturb and destroy the happiness you enjoy in your father's house, at least till you be able to provide another home for yourself. Look again at the innocent Jesus. O happy the youth, happy the maiden, who knows how to preserve their innocent souls beneath the shelter of the safe and honest roof-tree of a true and honest and virtuous father and mother. Thrice happy are those who in after years can look back upon a life of innocence, upon a youth of untarnished virtue.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are models for us all in every condition of life. If in the inner life of our souls, and in the outer life of duty, the shadow of the cross falls athwart our path, let us not cease to look upon these sublime models. How often we permit ourselves to grow weary and careless in the work of our soul's sanctification, or to become too anxious, all through the erroneous idea, that it is only by extraordinary paths that we can reach heaven. In the Holy Family at Nazareth, we find the most ordinary and humble life; refined, elevated, sanctified, and spiritualized by a most ardent love for God. Here, too, we discover the most heroic virtues in the humblest walks of life, and see them elevated and strengthened by heroic sacrifice. Christian reader, implore this loving, peaceful Holy Family at Nazareth to accept you

as one of its members, to share with you its boundless merits and graces, and also to be near you at the hour of your death to comfort you, to strengthen you, and to accompany you to the judgment-seat of the most high Judge.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ST. JOSEPH'S HAPPY DEATH.—HIS GLORIOUS ENTRY INTO HEAVEN.

A HAPPY DEATH.

TO the unspeakable joy of His holy Mother and of His virtuous foster-father, the Saviour of the world had emerged from childhood and now stood before their fond, admiring gaze a full-grown young man. At the same time and in the same degree did the venerable St. Joseph advance in perfection of soul, while his body began to give way beneath the burden of his years. An internal voice, perhaps the voice of His visible Foster-Son, warned him of his approaching end. He had in truth completed his mission on earth, and faithfully discharged its high and arduous duties.

Never, since the beginning of the world down to our day, did mortal man die amid such holy surroundings as those attending the death-bed of St. Joseph. He drew his last breath while reclining on the bosom of Jesus, with his venerable head supported by the pure hand of his chaste spouse Mary. It was his unheard-of privilege to yield up his pure soul directly and immediately into the hands of his God, his Son, and his Judge, and to hear immediately and directly from His divine lips the assurance of eternal recompense.

The place where St. Joseph died is not expressly mentioned in Scripture. A time-honored tradition assures us that his grave was venerated for centuries in the Valley of Josaphat, not far from the tomb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Hence, some persons conclude that he must have died when on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem; for it would otherwise be hard to understand how his remains could have been transported from Nazareth to the neighborhood of Jerusalem. Concerning his last hours no information has been afforded to us by any contemporary writer. But one thing is certainly true, namely, that St. Joseph enjoyed, in the presence of Jesus and Mary, an unspeakably happy and peaceful death.

St. Joseph died thus peacefully because his whole life had been so well regulated, and so directed according to the law of God. Satisfied with whatever God was pleased to send to him, he had lived with and for God, with and for his divine Son. Pain, suffering, exile, and other dangers and afflictions were cheerfully borne by him for the sake of Jesus. With his own hand He had served Him. To maintain Him he had worn out his physical energies in hard labor; for Jesus and Mary he gave his whole life. What a comfort for St. Joseph's soul when leaving his body!—this conviction of having faithfully discharged every duty of his high calling. How zealously, too, he had made use of every grace that resulted from this intimate union of his soul with that of the divine Jesus!

In years long past, this silent but earnest man had lavished care and tenderness and protection on Mother and Child. Now, at the solemn hour of his death, this same Mother and Son reward him by their blessed and happy presence. Then could Joseph see, though he knew it long before, why Mary's devotion was multiplied in acts of kindness and encouragement; how her virginal hand wiped the cold death-sweat from his pallid brow.

In all the grandeur of God's dignity and majesty, though hidden under a human veil, stood Jesus at that same death-bed of His expiring guardian and defender. As He prayed to His heavenly Father, each syllable of His almighty word sank deep and with divine power into the soul of the dying patriarch. Every taint of this earth's dust that lingered in St. Joseph's soul vanished, and that pure and purified spirit awaited its speedy and happy deliverance from the prison house of the body.

It makes a great difference whether a man dies because he must, and thus with effort and pain so far resigns himself to the will of God, as not to be expressly opposed to the divine decree; or whether, on the other hand, he meets death cheerfully and with gladsome submission to the will of God. Thrice happy are those chosen souls in whom love for God is so intense and boundless that they can greet Death's coming with unfeigned joy; who can look upon the work of Death's unsparing hand as a favor from on high, as an operation of God's grace, as a means to God's glory, as the sacrifice of the body that the spirit may live. He who can die thus, is able to transform the condemnatory sentence pronounced upon sin into a work of love, and raises himself out of the bitterness of death to that heroism for the final sacrifice that leads to eternal glory.

Thus Joseph, the just man, died the sweet and consoling death of the righteous.

A pang of unspeakable grief pierced the soul of Mary at the moment of St. Joseph's death. Not that she gave herself up to useless repining, she who was so perfectly conformed to God's will, that she uttered not a sigh when the predicted sword of holy Simeon afterwards pierced her heart beneath the cross on Calvary, but she knew at least that her divine Son would soon leave her, to enter upon his public life as Teacher and Saviour. She knew

that she would have to pass the remainder of her days in loneliness. She well knew that the tragic drama of Calvary was yet to be enacted before her eyes, and therefore she congratulated her chaste and gentle spouse on his happiness in leaving this world ere that awful tragedy could take place.

In the quiet cot at Nazareth, St. Joseph's death brought about no important change, save that the tender relations between Mother and Son were rendered more close and intimate. Mary now became both mother and father to her Son and Saviour; while He, on the other hand, became to his Mother, Son and Protector.

Here, Christian reader, you may see death—under other circumstances so full of horror—here you may see it shorn of all its terrors, and presented in its most amiable aspect. But this glorious death of St. Joseph was only the close, the crowning, of a life of self-denial, of a life of resignation to God's will, of a life full of trial and tribulation. If you wish to have a peaceful, happy departure from life, your life itself must first resemble St. Joseph's life in fidelity to your calling, in confidence in God, and in quiet, persevering patience.

To thee, O glorious foster-father of Jesus Christ, I express my sincere joy because of thy high favors and privileges both in life and in death. Saintly and beloved patron, it was but right and proper, and due to thy virtues, that a happy death should be vouchsafed to thee by a just and merciful God. For to Him and to His service had thy whole life been silently though effectually consecrated. I, alas! for my part, can justly expect a hard struggle at the hour of my death, for I have deserved it by my ill-spent life. But if thou be near me at that awful moment, I shall not perish. Thou art not only a dear friend of my future Judge, but thou hast been also His foster-father and protector. If thou commend me to

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Jesus, He cannot condemn me. Chaste spouse of my sublime Patroness, next to Mary I choose thee for my special patron and advocate. I promise thee sincerely that for the rest of my days I will venerate thee and serve thee with the most ardent devotion. Though I do not deserve such favor at thy hands, yet I implore thee to accept me, for love of Jesus and Mary, as thy constant servant. By virtue of that inexpressibly sublime companionship which thou wast permitted to enjoy during life with Jesus and Mary, I beseech thee that thou would so protect me during my days on earth, that I may never more separate myself from God. By the assistance extended to thee in the hour of thy death by Jesus and Mary, I implore thee to protect and defend me, especially in the hour of my death, that even in death I may be surrounded by Jesus and Mary and thee, and by thee and Jesus and Mary be admitted into heaven, there to thank thee, and in thy company to praise and love God for all eternity. Amen.

ST. JOSEPH'S WELCOME AMONG THE SOULS OF THE JUST IN LIMBO.

Glorious and happy though the death of St. Joseph was, yet the gates of heaven were closed against him. Angels conducted his soul to Limbo, and introduced it to the throng of just and holy spirits of the Old Law, who were patiently and cheerfully awaiting the coming of their Deliverer. Although this place of waiting was far from being like heaven, yet it was a place of rest and of bright hope, and contained the noblest and most highly favored souls that ever were created. A bond of love and common hope existed among its inhabitants, whose hearts beat high in expectation of speedy deliverance.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ in the chaste womb of the Virgin Mary, His grace-bringing birth in the stable

at Bethlehem, were miraculous events, some rays of which must have penetrated the recesses of Limbo with their enlightening, cheering, and warming influences. But St. Joseph came as a very special messenger of glad tidings, announcing speedy salvation to these expectant souls. Thrilled with holy joy, the Fathers of the olden time hastened forward to greet him. Adam came with Eve, they who had first received the promise of a Saviour, the first sinners, and the first penitents. Abraham came, the father of all Israel; then David bows down before Joseph's greatness, for David's crown fades and pales before the brilliant crown of Christ's grace worn by the poor and simple Joseph. All uniting about this welcome messenger from Jesus, they pray and praise God, and hope with renewed fervor and courage. Their joy of soul augments as Joseph speaks. For who among all the saints that were sanctified by the Old Law has a better right or more unquestioned authority to proclaim the love of the Saviour, and to praise the grace He brings to all, than that simple carpenter, who had nursed his God and Saviour as a little child, and through so many years had gazed with eyes of body and of soul upon His humble greatness and His great humility.

Thus were the closing years of imprisonment undergone by these just souls rendered sweet and glorious by the arrival and presence of St. Joseph, and especially by the truthful and graphic picture that he could give of their Redeemer already on earth.

Meanwhile the divine Foster-Child of St. Joseph will go about doing good, through the plains and cities of Palestine, awaiting the dawn of the day on which He will die to redeem mankind. The tree of the cross is still growing, fair and stately, with fresh green foliage, but it will soon be cut down, and the hole on Calvary will soon be dug to receive its second planting with the body of the Sav-

iour hanging thereto. And when the foot of that heavily laden cross shall strike the rocky bottom of the socket prepared for it a holy shudder will penetrate and pervade the soul of the just and holy foster-father, St. Joseph, even in Limbo. At that moment a mysterious emotion shall tell him that the divine sacrifice is now about to be consummated. While Israel on earth shall curse its King, St. Joseph in Limbo will adore his Saviour who is at this moment dying to atone for the sins of all men. Suddenly the earth will tremble, the rocks will be rent asunder, and the whole of creation will be agitated to its very depths. Christ shall then be dying on the cross. Then will the gates of Limbo be thrown wide open, and the soul of the Saviour shall descend into the midst of the gladdened Fathers of the Old Law.

Holy St. Joseph, what transports of delight will thrill through thy soul in that blissful hour, when in this place, under such circumstances, thou shalt meet once more thy Son and thy God! What happiness for thee to introduce to Him these souls of the ancient just! What will be thy happiness when, in the midst of thy admiration and wonder, thou wilt for the first time behold face to face the adorable, loving, and beloved Soul that was united with the Godhead in the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and united thus for all eternity! All full of sentiments of gratitude and love, thou wilt fall down and adore this divine-human Soul, thanking it for the victory which in union with its sacrificed and wounded body, it shall have obtained over sin, death, and hell. But at dawn on Easter morning the soul of Jesus will reunite itself to the adorable body in the sepulchre, never more to know separation. Forty days have yet to pass, and then St. Joseph shall secure for all eternity his holiest and highest reward—never-ending heaven.

ST. JOSEPH IN HEAVEN.

The glorious entrance of St. Joseph into the happiness of heaven was indeed worthy of the foster-father of Jesus Christ. It was his happy privilege to journey towards the realms of bliss in company with his beloved adopted Son and Saviour, and attended by countless throngs of the just souls who had been in Limbo. What a glorious spectacle, Christian reader, for the eyes of your soul to gaze upon! Compare this triumphal procession of St. Joseph with his flight into Egypt in company with that same Son and Saviour, and you may comprehend this mysterious change and transformation. The honorable society of Christ, the grand and joyous company, the myriads of rejoicing and adoring angels, the sweet-sounding chants of triumph and thanksgiving, all the unspeakable pomp and heavenly splendor attending the ascension of Christ into heaven, were shared by St. Joseph as, side by side with Christ, he was borne towards the celestial mansions. Such was the triumph of the poor carpenter of Nazareth.

The heavenly Father received St. Joseph, recognizing in him His own substitute and representative, and the guardian of His divine Son on earth. The Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, led him into the abode of happiness, there to reward him forever with childlike gratitude and divine prodigality for all that St. Joseph had done on earth out of love for Him. The Holy Ghost received and honored Him as the protector and faithful companion on earth of his own immaculate bride. The holy angels received him and paid him homage as the worthy spouse of their future queen, and thus came to regard him in a certain sense as their king.

Glorious St. Joseph! With Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, with all the heavenly hosts, I honor and glorify

thee as the honored foster-father of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; as the truest, humblest, and purest spouse of my revered Mother and Queen, the ever-blessed Mary; as a saint endowed with the most brilliant virtues and rewarded with the most dazzling splendor. I rejoice, I congratulate thee fervently and heartily on the honor and the glory vouchsafed to thee at thy entrance into heaven, at the glory and honor that thou still enjoyest, and which thou wilt enjoy for all eternity. I thank thee also, from my heart of hearts, for all the love, solicitude, fidelity, and care that thou didst exercise towards Jesus and Mary. I thank thee for all the pains, trials, and sacrifices that thou didst undergo for that same gracious Redeemer and His ever-blessed Mother while on this earth. And as these holy persons now no longer need thy care and protection, I implore thee, by thy love for Jesus and Mary, to turn thine eyes towards me, to extend to me thy protecting and defending arms; to care for me, for I sorely need thy assistance in order that I may be able hereafter to honor thee gratefully and to glorify thee fort ever in heaven. Amen.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN AT THE WEDDING IN CANA.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.

THE word of the Lord came to John, the Son of Zachary, in the desert, that he should prepare the way of the Lord. John therefore came into the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance unto the remission of sins. He pointed out the Messias, and when

the people asked him if he were not himself the Messias, or the Christ, who was to come, he answered: "I am the voice of One crying in the wilderness: make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaias; but there hath stood One in the midst of you, whom you know not. The same is He that shall come after me, who is preferred before me: the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose." (John i. 23–26.)

On the next day Jesus Himself came to the bank of the river Jordan, and permitted Himself to be baptized by His precursor. At the same time the heavens opened, the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus, and a voice was heard from heaven saying: "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased." (Luke iii. 22.) Attracted by the heavenly grace and superhuman excellence of His extraordinary character, some few disciples immediately gathered about Him. Among the first apostles was the beloved disciple, John, afterwards the Evangelist and the adopted son of the Mother of God.

Thus did Jesus begin slowly and noiselessly, though solemnly and honorably, His life of public teaching. His mother, dwelling alone in Nazareth, felt lonely in her poor home; though we may well infer that she was permitted in some miraculous manner to enjoy her divine Son's presence in spirit, though He might be absent in body.

THE WEDDING FEAST.

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee: and the Mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the marriage. And the wine failing, the Mother of Jesus saith to Him: They have no wine. And Jesus saith to her: Woman, what is to Me, and to thee? My hour is not yet come. His

Mother saith to the waiters: Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye. Now there were set there six water-pots of stone, according to the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece. Jesus saith to them: Fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And Jesus saith to them: Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine, and knew not whence it was, but the waiters knew who had drawn the water: the chief steward calleth the bridegroom, and saith to him Every man at first setteth forth good wine: and when men have well drank, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee: and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him." (John ii. 1–11.)

The holy apostle and evangelist St. John narrates this first miracle of Christ with special affection; evidently because it shows so plainly the influence exercised by the Mother of Jesus over her Son, as well as her kindly, provident solicitude for the welfare of her fellow-beings. With special tenderness and affection should you, too, Christian reader, contemplate Mary on this occasion, which is evidently intended and eminently calculated to revive our confidence and infuse sentiments of trust and security into our hearts.

The bridal pair were relatives of the Blessed Virgin, and, like her, virtuous and God-fearing. In accordance with the custom of the country all the kinsfolk of both families were invited to the wedding-supper. Mary, too, received an invitation. But how can she go to a party of pleasure! she who knows no other pleasure save the happiness of prayer, solitude, and patient retirement! But the reflection that perhaps those who invited her might be

grieved by her absence, or that she might seem to slight their kind advances, and to hold herself above her relatives, induced her to attend. Nay more, in her providential foresight that her services might be required she went several days in advance to Cana, which was four good leagues distant from Nazareth, in order to give to the young couple the benefit of her skill, tact, and experience in arranging for the celebration and in getting ready the wedding banquet.

THE EMBARRASSMENT.

Whether it was that more guests came than had been expected, whether because Our Saviour Himself came unexpectedly with His five disciples, or whether, because of the poverty of the family, a sufficient supply of wine could not be laid in, it gave out before the festivities were ended. This unpleasant occurrence was first noticed by the observant and thoughtful Mother of Jesus. But what would this mean? It was simply a little domestic incident of small importance, that might happen in any family on such an occasion, and especially in a poor family of Galilee. But the blessed Mother did not so look upon it. The difficulty must be remedied at any cost, thought Mary, rather than have the day's festivities marred and the young couple put to the blush. But how was it to be remedied? Could Mary presume to hope that her divine Son would come to their relief by means of a miracle? What a deep insight into the hidden life of Jesus and Mary at Nazareth is afforded us by this incident at Cana! It becomes evident that, during their hidden life, Jesus must have sometimes, in similar cases, manifested His miraculous power. In the present instance the only question was whether He would show Himself openly as a worker of miracles.

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The anxious Mother whispered to her divine Son, who sat near her: "They have no wine." How thoughtful, how kind, how provident, how full of meaning these few words of the Blessed Virgin! They contain and express kindly observation, motherly solicitude, humble request. But she knew well that all that was required was a reminder to be made by herself to her divine Son.

Mary had then notified Jesus of the failure of the wine, and received in reply the words of Jesus: "Woman, what is to thee and to Me, My hour is not yet come." There are some who pretend to discover a reprimand or a tone of harshness in these words of Christ. They err very much. True, our blessed Lord does not here address Mary in the sweet and tender name of Mother. Yet in using the word "woman," a word honorable and noble in itself, though savoring of disrespect when a son applies it to His Mother, our blessed Lord has a special object in view. He wishes to make us understand that, from the date of His entrance on the stage of public life, He belongs no longer exclusively even to His honored and respected Mother, but to all mankind sorely in need of salvation; and that if He is to perform miracles, He is to act as the Son of God and not as the Son of Mary.

How admirably sublime the position occupied by Mary in this circumstance! The Redeemer states openly and emphatically that His hour is not yet come for the public manifestation and exercise of His miraculous power, and yet He actually works a great miracle at the modest request of His Mother. Thus the eternal decrees of God are as it were accelerated, or even anticipated, for the purpose of sparing the young couple a mortification; and this is done out of regard to the Blessed Virgin. Here, Christian reader, you may discover what wonderful and extraordinary power Mary has with God.

Moreover the thoughtful and kind Virgin Mary points

out to us the conditions under which help is to come from God, when she says to the waiters: "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." Yes, if we would but throw ourselves with faith and confidence, unconditionally, into the hands of the Saviour; if we resolve to tread His paths, to keep His commandments, God will help us, and even be ready and willing to come towards us in a supernatural manner, when all ordinary and natural means fail to sustain us.

Do not fail to observe here, Christian reader, that Jesus Christ does even more than His blessed Mother asked Him to do. She wished Him merely to extricate the bridal party from an unpleasant embarrassment. This could have been effected by a new supply of the same quality of wine, or even of an inferior quality, it being the custom of the country to serve a less expensive wine towards the end of a feast. But Jesus did more; He produced a wine so excellent that the chief-steward was astonished. What a gentle and suggestive act of attention from Jesus to His beloved Mother!

THE FIRST MIRACLE OF JESUS.

This miracle, wrought by Jesus out of love for His Mother, is well calculated to awaken, to strengthen, and to elevate your unlimited confidence in this same holy Mother. She had not been asked by the bridal couple of Cana to use her good offices with Jesus. It is probable they were not aware of the deficiency in the wine until the whole thing had been remedied; yet Mary, though unsolicited, sought to relieve and supply their necessities. If you, Christian reader, in your hour of need pray to this same kind Mother, earnestly and persistently, if you assail her, so to speak, by your prayers and tears, will she not turn towards you a willing and attentive ear? At the

wedding in Cana it was question of a very trifling and transitory inconvenience. If, then, you turn towards her in the most important affairs of life, where there is question of saving your immortal soul, of preserving your innocence, of maintaining your very life; where there is danger of offending the Divine Majesty or of dishonoring the sacred blood of Jesus Christ, will she act less mercifully and efficiently in your behalf than she did in behalf of the embarrassed couple at their wedding-feast? When at Cana the blessed Mother was still sojourning in this valley of tears. But now her position in heaven, as Queen of angels, is eminently glorious and influential. Now it is her special office to act as Refuge of sinners, Comforter of the afflicted, and Health of the sick. Now that she dwells in the kingdom of rewards, she enjoys a formal right and claim to have her petitions heard at the throne of God.

Again, the presence of the ever-blessed Virgin and of her divine Son at this wedding-feast is a beautiful evidence that the mild and gentle Mother is pleased to see her children enjoy happiness and good cheer; that she is glad to sanctify by her presence all our pleasures, so long as such pleasures are innocent, pure, moderate, and enjoyed with thankful hearts and good intentions. Abstain, Christian reader, from every extravagant, boisterous pleasure, from those false enjoyments which have their foundation in gratification of the senses, and which leave nothing behind, but remorse of conscience, regret, uneasiness, discontentment with God, and with men, and impediments to your own high destiny. When about to take recreation, always first ask yourself, Would I dare to invite my holy Mother to be present with me in this hour? Would she not be compelled to reject indignantly such a presumptuous invitation?

CONFIDENCE IN MARY'S INTERCESSION.

Christian reader, in studying this charming incident in the life of your blessed Mother at the wedding feast in Cana, you must necessarily become deeply impressed with her goodness, and specially strengthened in your reliance upon her mercy and compassion. Hence it is well for you to make profession of such renewed hope and confidence. Give expression to your sentiments by repeating fervently and earnestly the following beautiful prayer of a holy and learned servant of Mary:

"O Blessed Virgin Mary, thou art the veritable Mother of mercy and of comfort. Though thou art rich, great, and powerful, yet thou art bountiful and generous. Thou art merciful towards all creatures, thou canst effect all things with thy beloved Son.

"In the time of tribulation beautiful is mercy, like to a rain-cloud in the season of drought. As a light cloud thou mercifully screenest thy children from the scorching heat of the sun, that is to say, from the wrath of thy Son. Thou shelterest them and refreshest them against the fires of burning passions. Like a rain-cloud thou dost soften them, and moisten them, and fertilize them to good works by thy grace. Thou art not merely one of the wise virgins, but the wisest among them all. Thou hast the oil of mercy in all thy vessels—in the vessel of thy heart, by love; in the vessel of thy hand, by deeds; in the vessel of thy mouth, by intercession. And as thou hast given birth to Mercy itself, so is thy chaste and sacred person naught else save the Seat of Mercy." (Raym. Giordani *in opusc. B. V. lib.* 6, c. 14.)

Hasten, then, O Virgin Mary, with all the plenitude of thy generosity and mercy, to the help of sinners. The generosity and magnanimity of earthly queens is shown when they pardon a criminal condemned for dis-

loyalty and misdeeds. I cannot believe, O Queen of heaven, that thou hast but little power in the kingdom of thy divine Son, or that thou wouldst fear to exercise thy influence. I am the greatest of sinners, and I know that I deserve death by reason of the many great crimes upon my conscience. Stand near and assist me, then, Blessed Virgin, show thyself to be a queen and a mother. Thou seest the sluggishness of my soul. Infuse into it life and activity. Thou knowest the wounds of my soul, be to me a good Samaritan, pouring in oil and wine. This I implore from thy great mercy. This I seek in thy inexhaustible generosity and love, in order that, through thy maternal intercession, I may obtain eternal life, and thus be enabled to praise thee, love, cherish, and venerate thee throughout all eternity. Amen.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN DURING THE PUBLIC LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST.

THE holy Gospels do not tell us whether the Blessed Virgin accompanied her divine Son during the three years of His public ministry, or whether, remaining in the seclusion of her humble home at Nazareth, she prayed for the happy success of His good work, seeing, admiring, and learning in spirit only His wonderful miracles and heavenly teachings. For if she were with Him in person, the bright rays of His fame, honor, and grateful recognition on the part of His admiring friends and followers would necessarily be reflected to a great extent upon her. Under any circumstances the blessed Mother of God would be in her proper place; whether by the side of her

Son, or in her own little room at Nazareth. Yet I prefer to stand by the opinion that Mary kept to her home in Nazareth, and that she now and then came to Capharnaum, or perhaps somewhat oftener to Galilee, in tender devotion and solicitude for Him whenever He visited those places. Yet we must believe that there was no separation of hearts between them. For never did there exist on earth two such loving hearts, never were hearts so intimately and fondly bound together as the hearts of Jesus and Mary. In every respect, the glorious and honorable public life of Jesus was to His Mother at once an inexhaustible source of mingled happiness and sorrow, according as He Himself, His teachings and His good deeds were received or rejected by His people.

MARY'S JOYS.

Jesus Christ now became a public teacher of the people and was full of grace and truth. More especially was he a comforting teacher for the poor. The poor, the humble, and the sorrowing He declared to be blessed. Who knew better how to understand and appreciate the sublime teachings of the Saviour than Mary with her exalted soul, her thoughtful mind, and her deep religious feeling?

Jesus was a worker of miracles "anointed with power who went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed." (Acts x. 38.) The suffering children of men, the darlings of Mary's compassionate heart, looked with hope and confidence to her Son as their deliverer. The lame, the blind, the deaf, the speechless, the disconsolate, the outcast lepers, the possessed, the dejected, the fevered patients were all healed. What an indescribable joy and delight to that sympathetic soul who at the wedding-feast in Cana could not bear to have the parties

concerned subjected to a trifling annoyance! We may well suppose that Mary, who is the Health of the sick, interceded many a time for such sufferers, or perhaps even led them herself to the presence of her beloved and loving Son that He in His goodness and power might heal them.

Jesus Christ became, moreover, the most renowned personage of His time. His name and reputation went out far beyond the confines of Judea and Galilee. The admiration of the people for His character was profound, they were loud in sounding his praises. Plain, candid, and sincere were their testimonies and the signs of their reverence and admiration. "A great Prophet is risen up among us," cried the multitude, "and God hath visited His people." (Luke vii. 16.)

Mary's heart throbbed with intense delight when her Son was conducted in triumph into Jerusalem as the Messias; when the multitudes that went before and that followed spread their garments in the way, and cut boughs from the trees and strewed them in the road, and cried, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest." (Matt. xxi. 8, 9.) This Teacher, this Wonder-worker, this most renowned personage of His time and country was the Son of Mary. One must possess the fond and tender heart of a mother to be able to know what a joy this was to the Blessed Virgin. For whatever honor and gratitude were shown by men to her Son, she considered her greatest pride and satisfaction.

MARY'S HUMILITY.

But all this happiness produced in her heart by the grand and glorious career of her divine Son, and by the honors that men bestowed upon Him, did not endanger

the character of her humility. Never for a moment did she permit herself to suppose that the dazzling rays of fame and honor shining upon the person of her Son were reflected upon her own person. Jesus Himself knew her humility and protected it. He understood so clearly the inward sentiments of her agitated heart that He addressed her publicly in a way that would seem to us cold and indifferent. This He did to save her feelings.

According to Holy Scripture, Jesus alluded publicly to His blessed Mother only twice. On each occasion He spoke in such a manner as to give evidence of His filial desire to shield His Mother from the notice of an overcurious public. Indeed, we may easily imagine that the lowly handmaid of the Lord earnestly besought the Saviour to avert from her the notice and attention of the world.

The Saviour on one occasion, to the wonder and astonishment of the surrounding multitude, cured a person possessed by the devil. The Pharisees, however, in their maliciousness of heart, declared that He had driven out the devil by the power of the prince of devils. But Jesus in His wisdom succeeded so easily in disproving their malicious assertion, and brought His enemies to such signal defeat and discomfiture, even adding to the miracle the most exalted lessons, that a woman in the crowd, overcome with awe and veneration, cried out to the Saviour: "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that gave Thee suck!" (Luke xi. 27.) Jesus replied at once, "Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."

In the sincere and heartfelt words of this simple woman Mary was praised for being the Mother of a powerful and wise Ambassador from God. "What a happy mother must she be who bore and brought up such a Son as this man," reasoned the poor woman in her own admiring

mind. But our blessed Lord, though He did not contradict these words, added a new praise of His Holy Mother, by declaring her to be blessed, not merely for having been His Mother, but because she had listened to God's word and had kept it. True, His words of praise appertain to all pious hearers and faithful observers of God's word, so that in the eyes of the public the Blessed Virgin did not seem to stand forth in her exclusive and complete fulness of dignity, nor in all her own peculiar and individual brilliancy of excellence. Here we ought certainly to admire and revere the wisdom of the Son and the humility of the Mother. But how richly the blessed virgin Mother deserves the praise bestowed upon her! How well she will continue to merit, through all ages, as long as man shall be redeemed by the grace of Christ! Those words of the woman in the gospel, the words of Jesus too, shall be continued in the language of the Church and be pronounced by all grateful Christians, by all admirers of Mary, down to the end of time.

Not long after this the Blessed Virgin, accompanied by some friends and relatives, came to see Jesus and to hear His divine words. He was teaching in the synagogue amid a large and eager crowd of listeners, who with breathless silence were hanging to His very lips and taking in the divine truth. The gentle and diffident virgin Mother was unwilling to push her way violently through the immense throng of people. One of the listeners took it upon himself to notice the presence of the Saviour's Mother, and drew attention to her and her attendants, by saying to Jesus, "Behold Thy Mother and Thy brethren [for amongst the Jews one's near relatives were styled "brethren"] stand without seeking Thee." But He, answering him that told him, said: "Who is My mother and who are My brethren?" And stretching forth His hand towards His disciples, He said: "Behold My mother

and My brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of My Father, that is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." (Matt. xii. 46–50.) Here again does Jesus appear as the sublime Ambassador from God, exalted above the influences of flesh and blood. Here, too, He seems to disparage His beloved Mother; but while, on the one hand, He saves her humility, He, on the other hand, bestows upon her the highest commendation. For who has obeyed the will of God so faithfully, so perfectly, with so much spirit of sacrifice, so exceptionally in every respect as Mary did from the first moment of her existence? For this reason is she dear to His heart, not only as His beloved Mother, but also as the holy, self-sacrificing Handmaid of the Lord who, by virtue of her heroic fiat, "Be it done," pronounced in the seclusion of Nazareth, had permitted God's will to be done in her regard.

For you, too, Christian reader, there is contained in these apparently harsh words of the Son of Mary a truth as sublime as it is consoling. For you must perceive that if, in all your words, thoughts, and actions, in all your undertakings, you seek exclusively to do the will of your heavenly Father; if you often pray sincerely and fervently "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, you will become as near and dear to your loving Saviour as if you were, in blood, His brother, or His mother, or His sister. What a great grace, what an unspeakable happiness, to be obtained at so small a price!

MARY'S SORROWS.

Where is the child that is so universally known, praised, and treasured as its mother's heart would wish it to be? But what were the petty, though perhaps well-meant, acts of homage, which the common people showed to the Son of God in consideration of His stupendous miracles?

What proportion did they bear to the God of everlasting glory? What were they in comparison with the unbounded adoration which His blessed Mother offered to Him, and which she would gladly exact and bring forth from every living creature? In proportion as Mary was indifferent to her own renown, she was solicitous, eagerly solicitous, to watch over the honor and renown of her beloved Son. Her feelings were wounded to their depths when men failed to hear Him with all the respect and reverence to which He was entitled.

How painfully harrowing, then, it must have been to our loving Mother when public ingratitude and cruel and shameful contempt became the portion of her Son and Saviour! One only example will I give you, Christian reader, of the humiliating and degrading treatment which our dear Lord was pleased to undergo in the city of His forefathers. It was public, in the synagogue, in the presence of His tender Mother and other kinsfolk, and to their great grief and indignation.

"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and the fame of Him went out through the whole country. And He taught in their synagogues, and was magnified by all. And He came to Nazareth where He was brought up: and He went into the synagogue according to His custom on the Sabbath-day, and He rose up to read, and the book of Isaias the prophet was delivered unto Him. And as He unfolded the book, He found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me: wherefore He hath anointed Me, to preach the gospel to the poor He hath sent Me, to heal the contrite of heart, to preach deliverance to the captives, and sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of reward. And when He had folded the book, He restored it to the

minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

"And He began to say to them: This day is fulfilled this scripture in your ears. And all gave testimony to Him: and they wondered at the words of grace that proceeded from His mouth, and they said: Is not this the son of Joseph? And He said to them: Doubtless you will say to me this similitude: Physician heal thyself: as great things as we have heard done in Capharnaum, do also here in thy own country. And He said: Amen I say to you, that no prophet is accepted in his own country. In truth I say to you, there were many widows in the days of Elias in Israel, when heaven was shut up three years and six months: when there was a great famine throughout all the earth: And to none of them was Elias sent, but to Sarepta of Sidon, to a widow woman. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet: and none of them was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, hearing these things, were filled with anger. And they rose up and thrust Him out of the city: and they brought Him to the brow of the hill, whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong. But He passing through the midst of them, went His way." (Luke iv. 14—30.)

What a spectacle, dear Christian reader, for the tearful eyes of the Mother of Jesus! With feelings of terror she had perceived the first symptoms of the coming storm, and awaited its outburst with indescribable anxiety. When she saw to what lengths insane passion was about to lead these blinded people, she summoned all her energy and courage, and regardless of the mockery of the enemy, oblivious of all danger, hastened to the side of her divine Son on the brink of the precipice whence the mob sought to hurl Him down and kill Him. But here her terror was dispelled, and her anxiety for the safety of Jesus relieved,

for it became her happy privilege to witness another very great miracle wrought by her Son who, in His omnipotence, thwarted the efforts of His would be murderers, and escaped from their hands.*

Most loving and deeply troubled Mother Mary! I implore thee by the deep anguish which thy sacred heart experienced on account of the indignities offered to thy Son, and by reason of the mortal danger which He passed through in His own town, that thou wouldst be near me when I shall be in danger of death, whether of body or of soul. Above all, do not abandon me in my last death-agony. In that hour draw me to thee, hold me near thyself, lest my infernal enemies should succeed in hurling me down into the abyss of destruction.

SHADOW OF THE CROSS.

The mountain-brink at Nazareth was a figure of the heights of Calvary. No one felt this more keenly than Mary, no one thought upon it with greater terror and consternation. This mysterious dread of the future, this apprehension of the approaching fate of her beloved Son, constituted the abiding anxiety of the Mother of God. As in the harvest time the vigilant, industrious farmer, casting his anxious eye along the dim horizon, descries the small cloud gathering, his solicitude augmenting as the cloud slowly but gradually assumes larger, darker, and more threatening proportions, so did Mary's eye, quickened by maternal anxiety and dread, plainly discover the coming storm of the Passion of Christ. She saw in the distance, as elements of the storm, the selfish-

* Father Geramb speaks of the ruins of a beautiful church which the empress St. Helena caused to be built on this mountain, and which was known as "The Church of Our Lady in Terror."

ness of the scribes and Pharisees, and their rancorous hatred for her divine Son. More and more dark and threatening the cloud became, as it came nearer. Already the tingle in her ears began to assume defined proportions, and she heard the secret plottings of the cunning enemy and the rumbling of the infuriated populace, as they cried out against the Lord's Anointed, "Away with Him! Crucify Him!"

As has been previously stated, dear Christian reader, the Blessed Virgin knew, partly from the prophecies given in Holy Writ, and partly through the teachings of her beloved Son Himself, that He was to redeem and save man by suffering and humiliation. But in what manner or in what degree this was to be accomplished, or what length of time was to elapse before its occurrence, were circumstances that had not been revealed to her with accuracy.

It seems probable that our blessed Lord revealed gradually to His beloved Mother the dreadful mystery of His sufferings and death on the cross, and thus gradually prepared her to bear with strength and resolution the approaching storm, and to meet its hardest blows with patient resignation and unflinching fortitude. It was thus He prepared His disciples, giving them repeated hints as the occasion offered, until at length in the last year of His ministry, when on His way to celebrate the Pasch at Jerusalem, He declared it openly, saying: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death." (Matt. xx. 18.) Whenever and under whatever circumstances the heroic Virgin received closer intimation of the time and mode of her Son's passion, a fresh thrust of Simeon's prophesied sword was made in her agonizing heart. But she bore all with the fortitude of a heroine, with the dignity of a queen, and with the resignation of a saint.

Ever-blessed Mary, Mother of God, I unite myself to thee in all thy joys and honors; likewise in all thy sorrows and pains; in all that thou didst undergo and experience during the public life of thy Son, Our Lord. I rejoice that, amidst thy many sorrows, thou hadst also many joys and triumphs in the glory and honor shown to thy Son by faithful friends. With thee, blessed Mother, I desire most ardently that He may now and forevermore be known, adored, and loved as He deserves. As a compensation for our coldness and neglect in this regard, offer to Him, I implore thee, thy own maternal sympathies, in joy and in sorrow, together also with all thy other merits. Thus thou mayest secure to us, from His mercy, the forgiveness of all our sins. Amen.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MARY TREADS THE WAY OF THE CROSS.

PROFOUND mysteries, precious graces, and grievous sorrows in the life of our blessed Mother have been thus far, Christian reader, the subjects of your admiration and meditation. I have endeavored to present them vividly to your heart and mind. But now, when we are about to accompany our afflicted Lady on the way of the cross, and see her side by side with her persecuted Son, I feel compelled to cease my efforts at description or explanation. When the prophet Jeremias was permitted by heaven to foresee this same dismal picture of sorrow, he knew not with what to compare it. In his deep sympathy, he cried out: "To what shall I compare thee? or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? to what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter

of Sion? For great as the sea is thy destruction; who shall heal thee?" (Lam. ii. 13.)

The sufferings of Son and Mother are mutual, and may not be separated; for in her very heart and soul Mary suffered by sympathy in every cruel pang and degrading scene occurring at the Passion of the Lamb of God. Besides being a tender and sympathizing mother in every human sense, she possessed in an extraordinary degree a clear knowledge of the person who suffered, as well as of the reason why He suffered. The following truths, which ought to be kept constantly in mind during our study of the Passion of Jesus Christ, stood out clear before the eyes of Mary's soul:

He who is suffering such indescribable ignominy is the supreme God.

He who is suffering these indignities is the most loving and lovable among men.

He who is suffering this inhuman treatment has every claim upon the love of men.

He who is suffering thus innocently suffers on account of love, and of His own free will; suffers, too, more than is necessary, all for the purpose of redeeming the world, and of rendering ample atonement to the heavenly Father.

How the clear, deep knowledge of these truths must have awakened the most sympathetic suffering in the tender and compassionate Mother and Virgin!

Yet in regard to the sufferings of Mary you must not forget, Christian reader, in your heartfelt meditation on her sorrows, that, from first to last, she followed her Son of her own free will; that she followed Him impelled not alone by the natural impulse of a mother's love, but more with the wish to suffer on her own part as much as possible in the act of man's reconciliation to his Creator: by her own sufferings to make herself as worthy as possible of heavenly joys; and on her part, also, to give ex-

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pression in the most heartfelt manner to her Father in heaven of her deep love and sincere gratitude. You must also bear in mind that, according to the best opinion of most of the Fathers of the Church, the Blessed Virgin, during all these severe trials, needed continual strength, aid, and support from heaven, without which she must certainly have died of grief and exhaustion. Yet this assistance from heaven was not such as to lessen the intensity of Mary's suffering; on the contrary, it rendered her capable of undergoing a greater amount of grief, by keeping her up and alive, and thus compelling her to bear a greater measure of affliction!

Heroic Queen of martyrs! So guide and strengthen me that I may be able to walk in thy footsteps, with grateful love and sorrow of heart, and thus learn to love thee the more tenderly, to serve God more faithfully, to avoid sin more conscientiously, and to bear my own private afflictions with more patient resignation.

"HOSANNA!" AND "CRUCIFY HIM!"

The days immediately preceding the capture of our blessed Lord by His enemies were passed by the anxious Mother in Bethania, a town lying about two miles from Jerusalem. She was tarrying with Martha and Mary, whose brother, Lazarus, Christ had previously raised from the dead.

The Holy Gospels do not inform us whether the blessed Mother was present or not at the first stages in the Passion of her beloved Son. It is only on blood-stained Calvary and under the cross that her fair vision breaks upon us like that of an angel standing before us. But this very circumstance of her presence on Golgotha in the very height of the bloody drama, as well as her overwhelming love for her Son, and, finally, a tradition univer-

sally received in the earliest days of Christianity, leave no doubt in our minds that she witnessed, not only in spirit, but in person, every event in that dreadful tragedy, that she was present at every step from the high-priest's house to the entombment of her dead Son. How could we suppose for a moment that a mother so loving and so zealous in the cause of redemption as we know Mary to have been, could remain quiet in Bethania while her Son and Saviour was enacting in Jerusalem the various solemn acts of the dread tragedy of atonement. It may be that even on the Palm Sunday previous the Blessed Virgin shared in the joy and triumph attending the entrance of Jesus into the metropolis. It is not improbable that she celebrated the Pasch together with the other holy women who usually followed Jesus, and that she received holy communion from His high-priestly hands in an apartment near to the "upper chamber" in the same house in which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His apostles. One thing at least is certain, namely, that on the night of the agony in the garden, she was complying with the wish that He three times expressed to His disciples: she "watched and prayed," if not in the garden, at least in her own seclusion. And the angel who comforted and strengthened the Son taught the Mother how to rejoice in suffering and be content in tribulation.

During that night of untold horrors, between Thursday and Friday, during which the gentle Saviour was given over, without a friend, to the brutal hands of the ruthless jailers, and subjected to their coarse and villainous sneers and mockery, and to every indignity that hell could suggest to its willing agents—during that night Mary was not with her child. Oh, what a dreadful and desolate loneliness for both Jesus and Mary! How harrowing to Mary's heart, if she was permitted to see in spirit these indignities! If not, then what an excruciating state of

uncertainty for her during the dark and tedious hours! Oh, that day would come! No, afflicted Mother, long not for the dawning of the terrible day which is to follow this terrible night. It will be the most awful day ever passed by a mother.

But the day dawned at last, and the sun rose over the earth that was soon to be stained with the blackest of crimes. It was Friday, the day that we unthinking Christians, without ever remembering why, call Good Friday. Now was the King of heaven and earth dragged from one contemptible judge to another. And while the rough executioners and the street populace in a state of wild frenzy crowded about Jesus to strike Him, to spit upon Him, and to mock and degrade Him even still more if possible, a gentle woman, with blanched cheeks but firm and decided features, might be seen struggling amid the crowd, her eager eyes fixed with a stony stare upon Jesus. She seemed the angel of sorrow and of patience combined surrounded by mad demons. Fearless was she, yet modest and retiring, and shrinking from foul contact with her Son's destroyers. Yet her terror-stricken heart kept its strength, and she came nearer to the object of her solicitude, nearer to the object of her love and adoration.

Again Mary stood before Pilate's house. On the balcony appeared Pilate, leading Jesus. Pilate addressed the wild multitude: "Whom will you that I release to you: Barabbas [who was a highway robber] or Jesus that is called Christ?" (Matt. xxvii. 17.) Jesus cast His eyes upon the crowd surging beneath Him, and looked as if He would fain remind them of His recent miracles wrought among them and to their advantage and profit, not to speak of His other kind, good works or of His wise and gentle teachings. Like a receding wave on the sea-shore were the voices of the excited crowd.

Then gradually gathering force, the sound of their voices swelled into a roar, and seemed like a returning wave to dash and break itself against the stone balustrade of Pilate's balcony. Amid the din were plainly heard the howling voices crying out: "Release unto us Barabbas, crucify Jesus!" Hardly one weak and timid voice could be heard faintly saying: "Release Jesus!" Thus was Jesus Christ, who had come to save and to teach all men, publicly and solemnly condemned in His own person by the unanimous acclamation of His own beloved people and in the courts of His own beloved city, Jerusalem.

Once more Jesus cast His eyes over the wild and surging multitude, in the vain hope of discovering one friendly, compassionate face, one voice protesting against this unfair and cruel sentence. Then His eyes met those of His afflicted Mother. As sometimes on a stormy night, one quiet, solitary star seems to look out from amid the torn and tearing clouds as they career madly before the hurrying winds, giving hope and courage to the benighted traveller, so did Mary's gentle face quietly beam from amid the black cloud of the enemy, and cast a warming ray of light and cheer into the dark abyss of Jesus' heart. As their eyes meet, their hearts embrace, their thoughts unite, their love, their sorrow, their tears, their sacrifice, their prayers, their grief-laden souls become one. Jesus becomes Mary's comforting Angel, Mary becomes the same for Jesus. When all affection seems forever banished, when the dearest ties seem snapped asunder, when even the heavenly Father seems to have forgotten and abandoned His divine Son, when Peter blushes to have known his Master, when Jesus seems to be utterly and hopelessly alone in the face of a crowd insanely panting for His blood, Mary's love does not fail. She is there, and will remain to the last, suffering with her Son and for her Son, and for us.

Near to the hall where Jesus was scourged, Mary was to be found. Every snap of the whip as it tore the flesh of Jesus, tore her heart to the core. Her blood ran cold, and her very flesh crept with anguish, as she saw the bloody thongs rise high in air above the heads of the multitude, only to fall with renewed force upon the mangled flesh of the sinless Lamb of God. Every blow found its echo in her wildly throbbing heart, till her sensitiveness was such that her own virginal flesh fairly quivered with pain at every blow inflicted upon the body of her divine Son.

Again Mary stood in front of Pilate's Court, when that mean, vacillating judge, leading their King clothed in a garb of mockery and with crown of thorns on His head and a reed for a sceptre in His hand, appeared before the people and said mockingly: "Behold the Man!" "*Ecce Homo!*" What a heart-rending sight to behold! Mother of sorrows! behold the Man that was conceived of the Holy Ghost, behold "the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth." Behold Him streaming with blood, mocked, despised, rendered almost unrecognizable, and commended by Pilate to the mercy of the lowest populace. "Behold the Man!" and hear the shrieks of the beholders, "Away with Him, crucify Him!"

THE MEETING ON THE WAY TO CALVARY.

The sentence was pronounced. Its every word was a death-knell in Mary's ears, tolling for her own death and burial. With such haste as only a thirst for blood can inspire, was the great rough cross prepared, and the procession put in marching order for Calvary. What a contrast between this march and the triumphant march of the preceding Sunday into that self-same city, and among that same people! After all the afflicted Mother had

already suffered, we cannot but wonder that she still retained strength sufficient to enable herto join in this hurrying and excited throng, and accompany her doomed Son on His last journey. But her very grief, her love, her strong spirit of self-sacrifice, nerved her for this new trial. As the Saviour loved His own even unto the end, so did she desire to be at His side until the end.

Accompanied by St. John and Mary Magdalen, the agitated Mother started ahead of the excited crowd, which soon came rolling on and roaring on behind them like a foaming and impetuous mountain torrent. At a certain place on the road over which the crowd must pass the Mother took her stand. She must see her beloved Son. In spite of everything she must gain His side and speak to Him a word of comfort, though she should be trampled under foot in her effort. Perhaps one single glance from her eye would afford Him new strength and courage; one word might help Him to climb the weary height of Golgotha.

Closely veiled, she stood alone—she the immaculate Queen of heaven—and awaited the coming of the King's Son and her Son. Peering eagerly over the heads of the ever-increasing throng of men and women who hurried out of the houses and came running up from the by-streets and lanes to see how the Seducer of the people was to end His ignoble career by death on the cross, she heard their sneers and insulting remarks, and shuddered at their blasphemous jokes, and shrunk from those who were boisterously loud in their approval of the action taken against Jesus by the authorities and the people. Then she hears the sound of trumpets announcing the approach of the awful procession. Then she beholds in the hands of the bearers the awful instruments of the coming execution—the ladders, ropes, hammer, and nails. Next she sees the two thieves, who, with heads erect, walk on

either side of her divine Son. At last, O God of heaven! what a shocking spectacle meets her eyes—a sight to unnerve the wildest savage of the forest; what a sight for a mother's eyes, for a mother such as Mary!

Sinking with pain and weakness, bending under the heavy weight of the cross, the Lamb of God staggers slowly forward, covered with blood. The crown of thorns is still pressing downward on His brow, forcing the blood to run in streams into His blinded eyes, so that He could hardly fix His troubled gaze on the countenance of His afflicted Mother. Anxious as He was to look upon her, and with one fond glance to thank her for her heroic, unselfish love, He made an effort to change His bowed position beneath the cross, raised His head feebly, and directed towards her one fond look of inexpressible anguish, mingled with grateful recognition and humble resignation. Unable to restrain herself any longer, Mary made a step or two towards Him, in the hope of embracing Him and of whispering softly in His ear a few words of pity and commiseration. But the rude soldiers drove her roughly back; either because they recognized in her the Mother of their Victim, or more probably in obedience to the law which forbade any manifestation of pity for one judicially condemned to death, construing any such sympathy as a protest against and indignity to the decision of the high court.

Perhaps it was the inward anguish of Jesus at the sight of His afflicted Mother, or the brief halt of a few minutes, soon followed by the urgent pushing and blows of the soldiers in their eagerness to advance, that caused the exhausted Redeemer to stagger forward and then fall heavily and helplessly under His cross, prostrate to the earth. What a spectacle for his affrighted Mother! What a dreadful sight to witness! Her beloved and adorable Son, falling powerless- nay, almost lifeless, and

then to see His executioners striking Him, driving Him, to put Him again on His weary feet.

When the thickest part of the crowd had passed by, Mary followed as fast as her strength would permit. One in heart with her Son, her soul commingling with His, she walked in His footprints of blood. At every blood-drop that marked the path Jesus had trodden, she knelt in spirit and adored. At last, when worn out with pain, fatigue, and grief, she reached the summit of Calvary, only to meet new horrors, yet resolved to see them all.

O afflicted Mother, remember the many unspeakable sorrows which thou didst experience when following thy cross-bearing Son on the road to Calvary. It was the hardest and bitterest journey of thy life. Remember, dearest Virgin, this dismal march. By all the pain which thou didst suffer on it, I implore thee to stand by me as a mother, a guide, and a support, when I shall be on my way to death. Accompany me on my journey to eternity, stand near me in the hour of judgment. Offer for me to my Judge all thy tears to wash away my sins. Amen.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MARY UNDER THE CROSS.

THE STROKE OF THE HAMMER.—THE RAISING OF THE CROSS.

AGAR, the handmaid of Abraham, was compelled to leave his house. Seizing what was dearest to her on earth, her infant boy, she pressed him to her bosom, and with no other goods, left the house in which she had lived long and happy. Timid and lonely, she strayed away

into the barren, dry, and uninhabited desert, with no companion save her sleeping child. Here she wandered up and down in search of water for the boy. For herself or her own wants she had not a thought. Her search was vain. And when her child was almost dead she laid it down gently in the shade of a solitary tree, withdrew to some distance, turned away her face, and weeping aloud, said: "I will not see the boy die." (Gen. xxi. 16.)

Here, Christian reader, we have from Scripture an example of maternal love, of motherly grief and desolation. But far more deep and intense is Mary's love; far more agonizing the grief of the heroic Mother on the desert of Calvary.

Having reached the summit, Mary again saw her beloved Son. The cross had been lifted from His shoulders and now lay on the ground at His feet. Although His human nature shuddered in the presence of this instrument of suffering and of death, yet He gazed upon it with longing, and even loving, gaze, saluting it as the altar of justice and atonement, as the key with which He was about to unlock heaven's gate to Adam's descendants.

Presently the preparations for the crucifixion were completed, and the most direful act of human cruelty, as well as the grandest act of divine love, was about to begin. The unfeeling soldiers now tore off the blood-stained garments from the sacred body of Mary's immaculate Son. Alas, what agony! The garments had clung to the bleeding wounds, which were now again torn wide open and began to bleed afresh. Dear Christian reader, consider all that the Blessed Virgin must have suffered at this shocking spectacle: to see the person of her beloved Son thus shamefully exposed to the morbid gaze of a rude populace. Can it be that the innocent Victim, in undergoing the scourging, had not suffered punishment more

than sufficient to atone for all the sins that ever could be committed against the flesh?

And now is heard the sound of hammers. Christian reader, perhaps you have heard the sound of earth and stones falling upon the coffin in which lay the lifeless body of one whom you loved. Yet these stones and clods of heavy earth could not harm your departed friend. What must have been the emotions of the Blessed Virgin, as she saw and heard every blow of those heavy hammers as they fell upon the palpitating hands and feet of her living Son and fastened them with nails to the wood of the cross! A cold sweat started forth on the pallid, livid brow of the Mother of sorrows. A convulsive shudder ran through her whole frame at each blow of the hammers, and her own nerves and sinews seemed to her to be torn asunder. No martyr in the flames or on the scaffold ever suffered what the Blessed Virgin did in soul and body during these few awful moments. But God sustained His creature, and she survived it all.

Amid wild shrieks of savage satisfaction and delight on the part of the rabble, the heavy cross was slowly raised to an erect position, with Jesus hanging upon it. Now, indeed, for the first time does the afflicted Mother obtain a full and uninterrupted view of the wound-covered, blood-covered, mangled body of her beloved Son.

The shaft of the cross is now straightened, its foot fastened in the earth, and the executioners step back some distance to view their work and assure themselves that they have done it well. "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His Mother and His Mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas and Mary Magdalen." (John xix. 25.) St. John, too, the beloved disciple, was also there, as he himself tells us in his Gospel.

THE THREE HOURS' AGONY OF MARY.

Three hours of intense suffering followed the raising of the cross. No pen can describe, no heart conceive what Mary suffered in union with her dying Son during these three tedious hours. It would be indescribable and astounding even if she had not suffered previously. It was a great hardship to have these three interminable hours follow close upon such previous affliction. Writhing with excruciating pain, the Son of God hangs upon the tree of disgrace and infamy. He hangs between two thieves. He hangs naked and deserted between heaven and earth, as Mediator between God and man. And all the time the passers-by deride and mock Him, and wagging their heads taunt Him, saying contemptuously: "Vah, Thou that destroyest the Temple of God and in three days dost rebuild it, save Thy own self: if Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. In like manner also the chief priests with the scribes and the ancients mocking said: He saved others, Himself He cannot save: if He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God, let Him now deliver Him, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God." (Matt. xxvii. 39–43.) All this constituted another new sorrow for Mary. Every word of such blasphemy sent a pang through her heart.

In close proximity to the Blessed Virgin the soldiers sat themselves down to divide the spoils taken from their poor Victim, separating His clothing into four parts. His outer garment was without seam from top to bottom. Mary herself had woven it with care and skill during the happy days at Nazareth. Then the soldiers said one to another: "Let us not cut it, but let us cast lots for it whose it shall be. That the Scripture might be fulfilled, saying: They have parted My garments

among them: and upon My vesture they have cast lots." (John xix. 23.) This was another source of grief to Mary. On one side, the heartlessness of these creatures, to gamble in the very presence of a gasping, bleeding, dying victim for what little possessions He had left. On the other hand, it grieved her to think that these precious relics of the Son of God were in such vulgar hands, to be dishonored, to be worn by these men in their drunken orgies in low places and haunts of vice and corruption. But in the height of all her sorrow, she noted carefully the one to whom the garment was awarded, and soon provided means to redeem it from his hands and to preserve it carefully, for it was afterwards to become one of the most highly prized treasures in the keeping of the Church.

Then was placed at the top of the cross over the divine head the inscription in several languages, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." (John xix. 19.) As many words, so many thorns in Mary's mother-heart. Jesus! that sweet name, at the mention of which every knee is bent in heaven, on earth, and in hell, is here set up as a sign of crime and folly, to be blasphemed and mocked openly by ignorant, sinful men. "Nazareth." O what a host of fond recollections this word stirs up in Mary's heart! "King of the Jews." Yes, King in reality and truth. And not only the King, but also the God of the Jews. Herein lies the deep malice of this day's doings: in having taken the life of their King and God.

THREE DARK HOURS.

To all the griefs and terrors of Jesus' Mother as she stood beneath the cross was added still another terror. For the evangelist St. Matthew relates that, from the sixth hour to the ninth, a great darkness covered the

whole earth. According to our mode of reckoning time, the crucifixion took place about midday, or some time before twelve o'clock. Hence, according to the opinion of most writers, Christ would have been hanging on the cross, for a short time at least, before the earthquake began. We may suppose easily and with truth that the heavenly Father wished to punish and rebuke in this dreadful way those frightful blasphemies against His Son, and to stop the mouths of the blasphemers.

Anxiety of soul, remorse of conscience for the late dreadful enactments, despair, consternation, fear of still greater terrors to come, seized upon the crowd on Calvary and throughout all Jerusalem. Defiant and furious as they had been before, they were now cowed into fear. But all through the thickest of the darkness, Mary continued to stand at the cross of Jesus. During an occasional moment of solemn and oppressive stillness, the afflicted Mother could plainly hear a suppressed moan and even the heavy, painful breathing of the agonizing Jesus. Yet she stood, and stood motionless, prayerful, grieving, and courageous, with her aching head reclining against the lower part of the cross.

INTERCESSION AND PARDON.

The sorrowing Mother now began to hope and to desire most fervently that, owing to the indescribable suffering which her Son had passed through, by reason of the excessive weakness consequent upon the copious loss of blood, as well as from the dreadful position in which He was suspended with the whole weight of His body hanging upon the nails, all this would deprive Jesus of consciousness and render Him insensible to pain. But she soon had evidence that all His faculties were as strong and as

keenly alive to every circumstance surrounding and attending Him as they had ever been.

The suffering Saviour began to speak. What is He about to say? Does He utter grievous lamentation and complaint, or perhaps a word of comfort to His Mother? No. There are matters and persons that seem to be nearer to Him during these awful moments—nearer even than Mary to the divine heart in its last pulsations.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke xxiii. 34.) Such the strange words that are heard from the top of the cross, sounding solemnly in the darkness. At once the divine Mother is reminded, though she had never forgotten it, of the aim and object of these sufferings. She recognizes the noble, magnanimous heart of her own Son. These are words of prayer, of intercession, of excuse and palliation, spoken by the wronged and murdered Jesus in behalf of His tormentors. With what inward fervor did the blessed Mother of sinners unite all her merits, all her sufferings, her whole heart and soul with this intercessory prayer uttered by Jesus in aid of blind humanity!

Now another interval of silence prevails. Presently one of the thieves who was crucified with Jesus, the one at His right hand, touched inwardly by divine grace, and moved to pity at the sight of the Redeemer's excessive sufferings, said to Him: "Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom." Jesus replied at once: "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Now how was this malefactor thus suddenly inspired with such sentiments of pious faith? Tradition states that he was the same person who years previous had afforded protection and shelter to Mary and the Infant Jesus when they were fleeing into Egypt from the wrath of Herod, and that now grace of repentance and remission of his sins were extended to him by the dying

Jesus in gratitude for that act of charity. This tradition we are at liberty to accept or reject. Yet we may safely attribute his conversion and forgiveness to the intercession of the Mother of sorrows. Yes, the compassionate heart of Mary sympathized indeed with the sufferings of her Son, but it sympathized keenly also with the lesser sufferings of His two crucified companions, sinners though they were. But above all it grieved her compassionate heart to think that the souls of these two dying men should be in danger of being lost within sight and hearing, in the very presence of the Redeemer who was at that very moment dying to save them. From the very depths of her troubled heart there ascended to the arms and head of the cross, and thence up to heaven itself, silent but fervent prayer for their immortal souls. At such a moment and in such circumstances such a prayer could not fail of its object. Mary's heart-wish was granted. One was saved; the other, too, would have found the grace of repentance had he not by his inexcusable and uncalled-for blasphemy rendered himself unworthy of it.

O gentle, loving, merciful, tearful, prayerful Mother, I thank thee for this gracious act of mercy which thou didst accomplish under the cross of thy divine Son. By the love of Jesus Christ, and by His sufferings, I beseech thee, by thy own sufferings I conjure thee, that in my hour of death thou wilt also combat for my soul's safety, praying and importuning that, notwithstanding my many sins and my base ingratitude, I may hear from the lips of my Redeemer: "Verily, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BEHOLD THY SON! BEHOLD THY MOTHER!

IT was in capacity of the world's Redeemer that Jesus died upon the cross. Hence the first and chief object of His sufferings and of His care and solicitude was the human family in general. Yet He could not and did not forget the person of His beloved Mother who had so faithfully stood by Him in His hour of suffering. To the angelic St. John, His best beloved apostle, who had followed at His side through all His sufferings, the dying Son entrusts the precious treasure for keeping, and leaves to His care during her sojourn on earth His now weeping and desolate Mother.

THE SON'S SOLICITUDE.—THE MOTHER'S GRIEF.

"When Jesus therefore had seen His Mother and the disciple standing, whom he loved, He saith to His mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that He saith to the disciple, Behold thy mother." (John xix. 26.)

In these few and simple words, Christian reader, you may perceive the solicitude of the divine Jesus for His sorrowful Mother; the new sorrow of the Mother herself; the happy privilege and distinction conferred upon the beloved disciple; and also the happiness that comes to us from these ever-blessed words of Our Saviour.

The filial solicitude of the divine Son. In the midst of his own unspeakable pain, Our Lord and Saviour, thought not of Himself, but rather of the one dearest to His heart. True, He does not point her out by the sweet

and sacred name of mother; for He wishes to spare her the mockery and the obloquy which even this exalted name would bring upon her from the unfeeling enemy. Moreover, the mention of this endearing epithet would but intensify the grief which was already wasting her tender and sensitive heart. Both Son and Mother were called upon in this hour to endure a sacrifice of the most sublime self-denial towards each other. How gladly would Jesus have taken His Mother with Him into the realms of bliss and peace! How just and proper it would seem that she should be the first, after her divine Son, to take possession of eternal glory! But the time had not yet come. For, according to the wise decrees of divine Providence, her presence on earth was still necessary to the Apostles and the young and struggling Church. She was to be a bond of unity, love, and strength. But, though she was to be deprived of the bodily presence of her Son on earth, He bequeathed to her in His dying moments, as her own peculiar treasure on earth, the pure and virginal St. John. This chaste soul was the most suitable and most worthy among all men to become a substitute for Jesus with the bereaved Mother. To Him could she with the least difficulty transfer the affection which she cherished for her own Son.

Consider the renewed grief of the divine Mother! Of course, the fond Mother and humble handmaid of the Lord knew how to appreciate the tender solicitude of her dying Son, and she therefore sent up a glance of grateful acknowledgment to His sorrowing countenance. Yet it also brought at the same time a new pang to her soul. It was a divine confirmation of what she had dreaded for years past. It was a deep and bitter verification of an old foreboding on which she hardly allowed herself to think; namely, that she was to lose her only beloved and greatest good. She knew not how she could live without Jesus.

And, alas, what a sad exchange it was! John was to replace Jesus. Instead of her Child, the servant was to be given to her. The son of a Zebedee to be a substitute for the Son of God, a man instead of her Lord and God.

Yet still another deep and copious fountain of sorrow began to flow upon the heart of Mary, when she slowly withdrew her tearful gaze from the face of Jesus, and cast her weeping eyes upon the cold and indifferent world that lay in darkness around and about this mountain of Calvary. St. John being the only disciple that had remained true and faithful among the apostles, was the sole representative on earth of the true Church, of members, and of children. To this holy Church had the dying Saviour entrusted His own beloved Mother. John alone was present to accept this charge. To the Church was Mary to belong. The glorious Virgin was to be its protectress during all time. What a momentous position to be assigned to the simple maiden of Nazareth! And what kind of children was she destined to find in the Church? Some few faithful sons and daughters; but many rebellious ones, too, who were to give her pain instead of joy. Many among them would prove false and be a disgrace to her. Many would be lukewarm and afford her but little consolation. She felt as if she would gladly open out her motherly heart, and pour forth the fulness of her motherly love over the entire world and into the hearts of all the children of men. Next to John, her heart goes out to the first penitent in the Church, the pardoned thief on his cross, who is the next one to her to be loved after St. John.

What a distinguishing privilege for the Beloved Disciple! For him, too, it was an unspeakable grief to stand helpless at the cross of his beloved Master. With the last breath of Jesus St. John would lose his only good on earth, his Father and Friend, his all in this world. And

who would repair this loss? Who else but Mary could fill the void in his desolate soul? The purity and fidelity of this angelic disciple were to be honored and rewarded by the possession of the immaculate Virgin. His true and self-sacrificing love was to be rewarded by the presence of her who was full of grace. She was to be the comforting refuge, the help and encouragement of St. John and of all the other apostles. Very properly and beautifully does Theophilus say: "Behold how the Saviour honors His disciple, by giving to him for a mother the Mother of God herself, thus constituting him to be His own brother. So does God reward those who are true to the cross and who till the last moment of their lives follow their loving Master and stand under His cross."

THE JOY OF THE CHURCH.

Everything that our blessed Saviour did, suffered, and thought on the cross had some bearing on the completion of our salvation. Being both Priest and Victim, He could not will otherwise than to make straight and easy our road to eternal happiness. Hence it was not merely the promptings of an individual love for Mary and St. John only that led the Saviour to pronounce this last will and testament. These words, "Behold thy son; behold thy mother," contain and express the mystery of unbounded love which Jesus entertained for all men, more especially for those in the household of the faith,—for the Church which is appointed and authorized to lead men to their salvation. St. Lawrence Justinian explains these words very aptly, by thus paraphrasing the Saviour's words to His Mother: "Behold thy son; for he bears in himself an image of the Church, who is an immaculate spouse. This Church I leave to thee in the person of My disciple. Love it in him, and you will love Me. Strengthen

it by your exhortation, fortify it by your good counsel, direct it by your holy example. It is My desire that henceforth thou shalt treat it as thy child, protect it by thy intercession, and finally that thou lead it to Me enriched with virtues and merits. To the Church, too, I will give instructions, and make it its duty that it honor thee as its Mother, that it love thee, and that it adopt thee as its refuge, that it appoint thee its mediatrix between God and itself (its members), that it shall call on thee in times of danger, consult thee in doubt, and pray to thee in all necessities. I do moreover take care that all the faithful shall apply to thee, and that thy name shall be loved and honored from generation to generation. Whoever shall call upon thee shall not be despised, nor estranged from Me. By means of an indissoluble band of love, I bind thee to My Church, and My Church to thee." (St. Laurent. Just. *De Triumph Christi Agone.*)

Glorious inheritance! Bequest of happiness and blessings! It was not enough for the love of Jesus to have restored heaven to us by His life and death, and even to have given us Himself by the institution of the eucharistic mystery of the altar, He wished also to give us His dearest Mother. Thus did he love us, and love us to the end.

And how faithfully and efficiently this loving Mother has ever discharged her sublime maternal duties towards the Church. To the Sacred Heart of Jesus nothing is dearer on earth than His beloved spouse the Catholic Church! Hence she has always been found worthy and been privileged to follow His dreary way of suffering. The same contempt and mockery which the Jews heaped upon the head of her divine Founder have been continually repeated, and again and again hurled at the face of the Catholic Church, though in the midst of it all she has pursued the even tenor of her way, going forward

through the world, sanctifying and blessing all who come within her saving influence. But Mary, too, the heroic and protecting Mother, has persisted in following the cross and in standing under it, which the Church has never ceased to carry during all ages. In the midst of storm and gloom, she has never failed to shine forth brightly and cheerfully, like a guiding star to the tempest-tossed mariner.

Of you, too, Christian reader, our dying Saviour was not unmindful; for He gave you as a favorite child of His own to be a favorite child of His Mother also. To you individually may be referred the words, the sweet words: "Son, behold thy Mother." And has she not at all times shown herself to be your good and loving Mother? Has she not exercised in your behalf all the forbearance, compassion, solicitude of a mother? Certainly it is something consoling, magnificent, and entrancing for a poor creature to be beloved by the King of eternal glory. But what the human heart craves and requires most, next to the love of God, is the love of a mother. Yes, Mary loves your soul with a love peculiar in its kind, with a mother's love.

Tender and affectionate Redeemer, with my whole heart I thank Thee for having given Thy own beloved Mother to be my Mother. I thank Thee for desiring, even in Thy last agonized moments, to add to all other countless blessings this convincing proof of Thy tender love for me.

Most tender and loving Mother, Mary! Yes, it is with delight and pride of heart that I call thee my loving Mother. With all the candor of a loving child's heart I thank Thee for having, even under the tree of the cross, adopted me as thy child. I bless thee, because thou hast not rejected me and cast me from thee, although thou didst know that I would turn out to be a disobedient, faithless, wicked child. Yes, Mother of mercy, it

is a touching sight to behold a happy mother pressing her innocent, laughing, playing child upon her loving bosom. But the truest, deepest, and fairest features of a mother's love are shown forth when her anxious, sympathizing eye rests upon her sick child. Such a sickly child has my soul ever been, weakened by sin and disobedience. Cast then, most loving Mother, thy healing and sanctifying eyes upon me. Do not turn them away from me, even should I be so unhappy as to still further offend thy divine Son.

Most deeply venerated Mother, I pray thee with all the ardor of a simple child that thou wouldst forgive me for having thus far shown thee so little filial regard and love. I now understand and acknowledge how rightfully thou canst lay claim to my gratitude and affection. I therefore pronounce in thy presence a solemn promise, that I shall strive earnestly to make myself worthy of thy mother's love and mother's protection. Frail, weak, and vacillating as I am, I shall continue to be thy devoted child. To thee I surrender my soul. Sanctify it, and conduct it before the throne of the divine Judge. Be with me always as my motherly intercessor. Amen.

CHAPTER XL.

MARY AT THE DEATH OF JESUS.

ABANDONED BY GOD.

AMID the most excruciating tortures the Lamb of God hangs upon the cross. A miracle of justice on the part of the eternal Father sustains the life of the world's Redeemer. The sorrowing Mother moves not from her position under the cross. With the unchanged and un-

changeable heroism of a martyr she holds out bravely through the chilling gloom and darkness, notwithstanding the new burden now placed upon her; namely, the motherhood of the human family. With apparently never-ending tediousness, the moments pass slowly away.

"And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying: Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani? that is: My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. xxvii. 46.) Oh, what a cry of terror to reach a mother's ear! The excess of His anguish had forced this cry from the dying Saviour's breast. To Mary's soul it told of excessive agony, both for Jesus and for herself. Not, indeed, that the heavenly Father had in reality abandoned His divine Son, nor had the divine nature in Jesus been separated from the human; but the whole force of concentrated, unspeakable pain and anguish pressed so heavily on that same human nature, that it required a divine, a miraculous support not to succumb. At the same time these words of the Saviour reveal a very sea, a tumultuous sea, of deep anguish of soul, of frightful desolation of spirit, and apparent abandonment by heaven. Oh, how deeply the Mother could now see into the desolate, abandoned heart of her Son! But how glorious the thought, Christian reader! While the heavenly Father, out of *justice*, conceals His sacred countenance from His only begotten Son, and delivers Him up to the most extreme and distressing desolation, the Mother still stands as close to the cross as may be, and all because of *love*. She is His Mother! She will not, she cannot, abandon her Son. O tender Mother! May it never happen to me of my own fault that God would abandon me, and deprive me of his grace and love, by reason of my iniquities. But do thou at least remain near to me, with protection and thy love. Mother of Mercy, do not abandon me in my last agony.

"I THIRST."

"Afterwards Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said: I thirst. Now there was a vessel set there full of vinegar. And they, putting a sponge full of vinegar about hyssop, put it to His mouth." (John xix. 28, 29.) How terrible must have been the thirst of the Saviour! Not a word of complaint had escaped His lips amid all His other torments, not even when the nails were piercing His hands and feet. But the burning fever that parched His every member forced from Him the heartrending complaint, "I thirst." Oh, how cruelly the blessed Redeemer had to atone for the gluttony and sensuality of many children of men, who eat and drink to excess! And the pitying Mother, the self-same compassionate Mother who, at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, had persuaded her Son to work a miracle, lest the guests should suffer a slight inconvenience from the scarcity of wine, has not now a drop of water to offer to that same Son; not a drop to moisten His fainting lips and tongue. Certainly the consciousness of her utter helplessness, the knowledge that she was unable to relieve her suffering Son, even with a cup of cold water, constituted a new and unspeakable sorrow. With the uncertain aid of a feeble lantern-light, she gazed upward towards the face of her fast-expiring child. She saw the swollen, trembling, dried lips; she perceived the sickly moisture of the death-sweat on His brow. She could render no assistance, give no relief. To the soldiers on guard she directed a timid, imploring look. One of them gave Him vinegar, in order that what his royal ancestor had foretold might be fulfilled to the letter. "And they gave Me gall for My food: and in My thirst, they gave Me vinegar to drink." (Psalm lxviii. 22.) Thus did that holy land, that land so beloved and blessed by God,

that land flowing with milk and honey, offer to the dying Redeemer only vinegar and bitter gall.

"IT IS CONSUMMATED."

"Jesus, therefore, when He had taken the vinegar, cried out with a loud voice, saying: Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." (John xix. 30.) The moment is now approaching, O Mother of sorrows, for which thou hast been prepared by a long train of graces and afflictions. "It is consummated." The great work entrusted by the eternal Father to His only begotten Son, the great act of combined justice and mercy, to which thou, O most exalted of mothers, hast contributed so largely and so generously, to which thou hast given thy fiat, "Be it done," is now completed. To His Father's hands Jesus commends His departing spirit. But thou must remain to pass a still longer period of time in this vale of tears, deprived, too, of the outward presence of thy Son, and renewing again for a longer time the anguish that well-nigh cost thee thy life, when for three days only thou wast deprived of His presence, on the occasion of His remaining behind in the Temple at the tender age of twelve years.

"And when He had said these words, bowing His head, He gave up the ghost." In death, at last, the Son bows down His head towards His afflicted Mother. Even till death His spirit dwells with her. In and after death His love is still with her.

But what effect has this awful death of the Son of God produced in the heart of the Blessed Virgin? When His soul took leave of His body, when the Saviour of men expired, the great curtain which hung in the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. The earth trembled, the rocks were split, the graves were opened, and the bodies of many of the departed saints came forth and

stalked in winding-sheets over the earth. Then the centurion, a roughly honest man, pagan soldier though he was, gave glory to God, saying: "Indeed this was a just man." The crowds of people whom these dreadful events had called out from the city and the surrounding country, on hearing and seeing all these terrible signs, returned home striking their breasts in consternation and alarm. If, Christian reader, inanimate nature, and men with little fear and less knowledge of the ways of God, trembled and wept at sight of the occurrences on Calvary, what must have been the sentiments of Mary's agitated soul, of her believing and loving soul, during this dreadful tragedy?

O sorrowful Mother! sorrowful unto death, it is beyond my powers to describe the agony which thou underwent when Jesus died. Let me weep with thee. Let me weep at thy afflictions, weep for the death of thy beloved Son, my Saviour; weep over my sins, and the sins of my fellow-men; for sin is the cause of this agony, the source of this awful death of Jesus. O best of mothers! be mindful of thy dreadful grievances for my sake. Especially, holy Mother, be mindful of them at the hour of my death; I implore thee to be with me as a protecting mother when my soul shall be leaving this earth.

THE THRUST OF THE LANCE.

Mary's sorrows were not to end even after the death of her blessed Son. She still remained at the foot of the cross, in tears, and with aching heart, though naught now remained save the mangled, cold, and lifeless body of her Son. Now the soldiers once more approach with their implements, and cruelly break the legs of the two thieves, in order to hasten their death and thus have their bodies removed before the beginning of the Sabbath, which commenced at sundown. But when the executioners came

to the cross of Jesus, and ascertained that He was really dead, they refrained from breaking His legs. One of them, however, as if to make doubly sure, plunged a spear deep into the flesh of His side. From this horrid gash issued a stream of blood and water. Although the sacred body of Jesus did not feel this last indignity, a deep and painful wound was inflicted on Mary's bleeding heart. At the same time, our virgin Mother apprehended clearly the great mystery signified by this wound in the side of the lifeless Jesus, and more especially by the stream of mingled blood and water. As from the side of Adam, the first bridegroom, our mother Eve was drawn forth by the hand of God, so was the holy bride to derive her life, and light, and strength, and all grace, from the side of her divine Bridegroom, Jesus, the second Adam. This mingled blood and water was to flow on till the end of time in the seven mighty streams of the holy sacraments—especially in the holy Sacrament of Baptism, and in the still holier Sacrament of the Altar—to cleanse, strengthen, and comfort all who would drink of their refreshing currents. During these solemn moments the Mother of God perceived in spirit and understood the immeasurable and countless benefits and fruits of salvation produced by the sufferings and death of Christ. To all these merits she prayed to be permitted to add her own sufferings, and especially the merit resulting from the dreadful anguish undergone in this last atrocity, when the laceration of Jesus' side tore also her poor heart in twain.

THE DESCENT FROM THE CROSS.

Towards nightfall, two men appeared with some attendants and the implements necessary to take the body of the Lord down from the cross. These were two zealous adherents of Jesus, and they were called, respectively

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The former had obtained from Pilate authority to take away the dead body of Jesus. What a glorious privilege to be permitted to secure so priceless a treasure!

With profound reverence, these two faithful friends approach the sorrowing Mother, who still stands leaning against the foot of the cross, absorbed in melancholy yet calm and resigned meditation on the awful mysteries that have just transpired. With gentle word and kindly mien they seek to comfort and cheer her depressed heart; begging her to withdraw for a few moments, as the duty they were now to discharge—of taking down the wounded and lacerated body of Jesus—would be to her a renewal of her grief. These good and kind men would not have Mary see the operation. But they forgot that love is stronger than death; they knew not that Mary's love was strongest of all loves. As long as she could see her beloved Son, even though it was but His soulless body, she would not turn her eyes to other object. At length the sacred body had been carefully detached from the cross, the nails were removed from hands and feet, the thorny crown was detached from His head, loving and reverent hands held the precious remains. But where should these lifeless remains rest, if not on the bosom of the fond Mother?—on that tender bosom on which, in infancy and youth, when full of life and beauty, Jesus had often before reposed. What a heart-moving spectacle, dear reader, is here presented for your study, comfort, and edification!

On the cold earth of Calvary sits Mary, overcome with sorrow, terror, and exhaustion, her frame weakened and shattered after two days of the most wasting excitement, without food or sleep to refresh her. Yet from her comely countenance, pale, worn, and haggard as it was from excessive grief, an ineffable peace of soul seemed to beam forth. When her eyes fell upon the disfigured

features of the body of Jesus, it seemed as if her heart would cease to beat, and freeze in very death. Alas, what a sight for a mother's eyes! The pure and holy and beauteous form of the fairest among men, all one mass of clotted blood and unsightly wounds. And yet, all-deformed as it was, there shone in that divine countenance a clear, calm expression of divine majesty. Now can Mary view the several wounds in that body. She can look into the gash in His side, and through the opening almost see the sacred heart of Jesus, all bruised and broken for love of man. Before her vision passes in detail the whole of their lifetime, of His life and her own. She recalls their mutual joys and sorrows, as Son and Mother, during thirty years. She remembers how she had often pressed that now lifeless form to her throbbing heart. She recalls how three-and-thirty years before, in the stable at Bethlehem, she cherished for the first time, with a mother's joy, this now cold and lifeless form. Before her memory rises up every year and day and hour of their quiet, happy life in their pleasant humble home at Nazareth.

The great prevailing wish of Mary's heart was, now that her beloved Son could not speak to her, to be permitted to cherish undisturbed and at her leisure, even these lifeless remains. With love, humility, reverence, and gratitude she meditates upon the lifeless Victim of man's iniquity.

How great your privilege, Christian reader! You are permitted to draw near to the living body of Christ. Yes, for you it is a body full of life. In the tabernacle on the altar of your parish church that sacred body dwells, dispensing light and life and grace to all who seek them. Nay, more, He comes Himself to you, not a wounded corpse to repose merely on your arms, but a life-giving body and soul, human and divine, to penetrate

to your very heart in the sacrament of holy communion. Oh! if your heart were pure and holy as Mary's; were your soul, like hers, animated with faith and charity, with longing desire and resolute determination, then would you be able to look upon the beauteous countenance of your God. It could not be entirely veiled by the sacramental species, but be made plain and visible to the eyes of your pure and sanctified soul.

MARY AT THE ENTOMBMENT OF JESUS.

God has been pleased to reveal to more than one of His saints—and indeed, on account of Mary's deep reverence for her Son, it seems probable, if not certain, that she claimed as a mother's right the duty of washing and preparing the sacred remains of Jesus. To what other hands could this solemn duty be entrusted? Only the blessed Mother dare touch the precious wounds. She alone could pick the thorns from His lacerated head and smooth and dress the flesh mangled by the scourges. She alone should wrap His precious remains in the winding-sheet, as of yore she wrapped His body in swaddling-clothes. Now for the first time she discovered the extent and number of these wounds. Each new discovery brought back in horror the remembrance of every successive stage in His tragic Passion, from the binding with cords on Thursday night, to the piercing with nails on Calvary and the thrust of the lance even after death. O merciful and compassionate Mother of sorrows! wash and cleanse my wounded soul, purify it from the stains of my countless sins.

Mary took part also in the burial of her beloved Son, though the Evangelists do not mention her name among those who were present on that mournful occasion. Is it not in accordance with her kind and motherly nature

that she should offer to Him the tribute of final respect and affection? It was now evening, and the crowd of morbid spectators who had witnessed the great tragedy of that memorable Friday had dispersed and gone back to their homes. In the fast-falling darkness, solemnly and slowly the few faithful friends bore the lifeless body of Christ to a new grave not far distant. A few pious women followed, weeping and lamenting. In their midst the Mother, the ever-faithful Mother. She, too, in her desolation, followed the dead body of her Son, of that Son who sorrowed for the sorrow of the widow of Naim, whose only son was carried out dead. For that childless widow He had wrought a miracle, and gave her back her son. For Mary, no divine worker of miracles appears to give her back her dead Son.

Never, assuredly, was human soul visited with sorrow like unto Mary's sorrow. Never did human soul experience such superhuman woe, such indescribable feelings of desolation, as overwhelmed her heart as she cast a last glance on the precious remains of her dead Son. Many a grave in human life closes forever upon a world of hope and of love. But no grave can resemble the tomb of Jesus. It stands there, hewn from the rock, alone of its kind, unparalleled in its sacred contents; for neither the One who is mourned, nor the one who mourns, has any peer in the human family.

Alas, how painful the last parting, the sad turning away from the sepulchre! St. John and the pious women besought and implored the Blessed Virgin not to linger. But how could she go, for her very heart lay buried in the grave of her Son? At last, the heroic woman makes one more act of sacrifice and submission to God's holy will, and then goes bravely forth into the lonely, dreary world. She wends her sad way through the darkness that had now

fallen on the earth, and passes once more the heights of Calvary. The gaunt dismal tree of the cross still rears aloft its ghastly proportions and stands painfully positive in the dim light of the rising moon. As she passes, Mary, full of courage, throws herself upon her knees and kisses fervently the wood made sacred by the blood of Jesus. This she does, first, as a proof of her reconciliation to that once ignoble tree which had played such a dreadful part in the great atonement; and, secondly, she kissed the cross as a sign of her love and adoration for the precious blood.

From the cross the virgin Mother bends her steps towards Jerusalem. Before her view lay the God-beloved, yet God-murdering city, over which the Saviour had wept but a few days before when predicting its coming destruction. By the same gate through which she had come out in the morning, she now at night passes into the town, accompanied by St. John and Mary Magdalen. As men measure time, but twelve short hours had intervened; but in the reckoning of time in the order of grace, it was a whole lifetime. Weak from thirst and hunger, her eyes dimmed with weeping, her every limb trembling with fatigue, her soul sad with the recollections of the day just passed, her heart crushed and desolate. Such was the condition of the Queen of heaven and earth when she came to the door of another's home, but which was now to be her home. It was the home of St. John, the disciple beloved by her divine Son.

MARY'S MERITS DURING THE PASSION WEEK.

Christian reader, now that you have journeyed in spirit, and in company of Jesus and Mary, over the royal way of the cross, and have, moreover, tarried on the heights of Calvary for three long hours, examine whether you have

derived any profit from this holy devotion. This pilgrimage of sorrows should have the effect of strengthening your love for Mary, of augmenting your confidence in that patient sufferer. How noble, merciful, and loving she has shown herself to be! What a rich harvest of merits she has reaped to herself on this painful way of the cross, and added them to her already acquired dignity of Mother of God! Both of these invaluable treasures—her dignity as Mother of God and her acquired personal merits—she applies fully and generously to those spiritually needy children to whom she gave birth under the cross.

Moreover, this journey of the Passion, Christian reader, which thou hast followed under the guiding hand of Mary, should fortify you in the practice of patience, in disinterested, quiet, happy submission to the will of God every time it may please Him to place a light and little cross upon your shoulders, or perhaps when He may pierce your heart with a slight thrust of affliction, or even with a deeper and heavier blow cause your heart to bleed. If the Son of the living God could say of Himself: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and so to enter into His glory?" (Luke xxiv. 26), if the Mother of God who was the most innocent and purest among women and who was personally enriched with the most copious merits and graces,—if these two were compelled to undergo such indescribable trials and tribulations, do not complain, Christian reader, whenever the word of God comes to the ears of your soul, saying: "He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me." (Matt. x. 38.)

Meanwhile, Christian reader, now that we are about to draw to a close our meditations on the sorrows and griefs of our beloved Mother, I beseech you to address to her with all the fervor at your command the following beautiful prayer of St. Alphonsus:

"O beloved Mary, my Mother, Queen of sorrows, Queen of martyrs, out of love for me it was that thou didst shed so many tears over thy dead Son Jesus Christ. But of what avail would all thy precious tears be, if I should be lost? Obtain for me, therefore, through thy power with God, and by thy own meritorious sufferings, contrition for all my sins, an amendment of life, and also an intense sympathy with the sufferings of Jesus Christ, as well as with thy own afflictions. Since thy divine Son and thyself, both sinless, have been compelled to suffer so much for me, obtain that I also, who have well deserved hell, may receive from the hand of God some severe chastisement to be undergone for love of thy Son and thyself. O blessed Patroness, if I have offended thee, then exercise justice towards me, by wounding me in turn and chastening my heart. Even if I have served thee, I beseech thee that thou wouldst even still chastise me. It seems disgraceful, indeed, that I should behold my Saviour wounded, and thee with Him, and yet see myself escape all chastisement. Finally, most blessed Mother, I beseech thee by the deep affliction which thou didst undergo when thou didst see thy divine Son bow down His head and expire before thy eyes, obtain for me a happy and peaceful death hour. O beloved advocate of sinners, I pray thee that thou do not abandon me on my entrance into eternity, but stand near my troubled soul when it will be assailed by the last temptation. And as in that dreadful hour my voice will probably fail me, and I shall not be able to call upon the name of thy Jesus, my sweetest hope and consolation, I call on Jesus and upon thee now, that He and you may be near me in my last moment. Hence I say now: Jesus and Mary, to thee I commend my soul, now and in the moment of its departure from this world. Amen."

PART V.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY DEPARTS FROM EARTH.

CHAPTER XLI.

MARY'S HAPPINESS AT THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

SHE YEARNS AFTER HER BELOVED SON.

THE great sacrifice is consummated, not alone by the Redeemer of the world, but by His blessed Mother also. The solemn tranquillity of the grave now rests upon Mary's lacerated heart. As when the sun has gone down, its rosy effulgence still bathes the earth and gives gentle promise of a new bright morning to come, so did the certain hope in Christ's speedy resurrection from the tomb shed on her calm soul a quiet, resigned feeling of comfort and peace. With faith and a hope stronger than Job's, she could say: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." (Job xix. 25.) This same hope it was, next to her fulness of grace, that had sustained her on the way to Calvary, under the cross, and at the sepulchre. What indescribable emotions pervade the human soul when its owner discovers the certain approach of some great and undoubted happiness! Such emotions reigned in the expectant soul of the Blessed Virgin, and grew stronger and deeper as she knelt in silent prayer all through the night preceding Easter Sunday. In body, Mary was in the house of her adopted son, St. John, but her thoughts, her affections,

her hopes and aspirations were in the newly made tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, where lay the body of her loved One.

In the heart of the desolate Mother lingered unspeakable and indefinable longings to see her Son once more risen from the grave, and standing erect before her full of life and divine beauty. Indeed, we need not be afraid to hold the opinion entertained by many learned and holy writers, that these ardent yearnings hastened the Resurrection, as they had also, in the opinion of these same writers, hastened the mystery of the Incarnation. And when this greatest of miracles did take place, the miracle in which the Son of the Virgin restored Himself again to life, and rose triumphant over death, what unspeakable happiness took possession of Mary's heart! As the great stone was rolled away from Christ's tomb, so from Mary's heart was lifted a great oppressive weight. With the Royal Psalmist, she might sing: "According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, Thy comforts have given joy to my soul." (Psalm xciii. 19.) Hence on Easter eve and all through the Paschal season, our holy mother the Church invites our blessed Lady to be comforted and to rejoice because of Our Lord's triumphant resurrection from the dead. Several times a day is sung or read the beautiful anthem "*Regina Cæli.*"

> "Joy to Thee, O Queen of heaven! Alleluia.
> He whom thou wast meet to bear; Alleluia.
> As He promised, hath arisen; Alleluia.
> Pour for us to Him thy prayer; Alleluia."

In the first place, Mary exulted for her Son's sake; for the Resurrection was in truth His triumph after humiliation, His consolation after His sufferings, His reward for His work of atonement.

Moreover, she rejoiced on our account, on account of

us, her children, to whom Christ's Resurrection was to be a pledge of our spiritual and bodily resurrection from sin and death. Finally, she rejoiced on her own account; for it was to her a source of great comfort, the great compensation for all her afflictions.

MOTHER AND SON.

Did Our Lord after His Resurrection appear to His blessed Mother? You may ask this question, Christian reader, for Holy Scripture affords us no direct evidence that He did. Certainly such a manifestation of the risen Redeemer was in nowise requisite to strengthen Mary's faith. For never for a moment did she doubt that He would be again restored triumphantly to life. But this very faith of hers, as well as her love and charity, gave her a stronger claim to this favor, to this happiness of seeing her risen Son and Saviour. How could the Son of God refuse this gratification to His fond Mother! How could He pass her by and give the preference to so many others who were not so dear to His heart, who had not come so near to His cross, and yet to whom He was pleased to appear after His Resurrection?

It is, then, a generally received and firmly believed opinion in the Church, dating from very early times, that the Saviour appeared to His Mother before He did to any other person. But who is competent to describe her transports of joy when He stood before her in all His mild and heavenly dignity. On Calvary Mary needed all the strength of a heart confiding in heaven and of a soul trusting in God in order to escape dying of grief. Now she needs the same fortitude not to die of joy and happiness. With what profound reverence she gazed into the marks of the sacred wounds in His hands and feet, and recognized them as evidences of His

complete victory over sin and death! What happiness to meet under such happy circumstances after a separation which, though but three days in duration, seemed to the blessed Mother like a lifetime, and was more painful than the three days of separation long ago in Jerusalem, when Jesus was but twelve years of age. Certainly the happy, proud Mother must have poured forth the feelings of her enraptured soul in a canticle of fervent thanksgiving, when she realized that all the sufferings of her beloved Son had passed, never again to return. Let us enter into the sentiments of Mary's heart, and sharing her joy, reverence, and love, repeat with her in all zeal the majestic verses of the grand old "Magnificat":

"My soul doth magnify: the Lord. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done great things unto me: and holy is His name. And His mercy is from generation to generation: unto them that fear Him. He hath showed strength with His arm: He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath upholden His servant Israel: being mindful of His mercy. As He spake unto our fathers: to Abraham and his seed forever."

EASTER JOYS AND SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION.

It is not sufficient, dear Christian reader, it will avail you little, to indulge in merely sentimental joy at the resurrection of Christ and at the happiness of Mary. For noble as your joy may be, it must, to be of any use to your soul, be made practical. Mary had been buried in

spirit with her beloved Son. In spirit and love is she now risen to a more heavenly life than formerly. The fact that for the future she is to belong more closely to heaven than to earth is one of her fairest Easter joys. Christian reader, resolve to rise from sin, to rise in spirit from the tomb of iniquity. From this spiritual death which is produced by sin, the sinless, immaculate Virgin could not rise, for she had never fallen under its dominion. But you, Christian reader, have good reason to read and study closely and frequently the sublime lessons which St. Paul gives us concerning the resurrection of Jesus.

He says: "For we are buried together with Him by baptism into death: that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death: we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer. For he that is dead is justified from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ: we believe that we shall live also together with Christ. Knowing that Christ rising again from the dead dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over Him. For in that He died to sin He died once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. So do you also reckon that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus Our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of iniquity unto sin: but present yourselves to God as those that are alive from the dead: and your members as instruments of justice unto God." (Rom. vi. 4–13.)

Do not mar, nor enfeeble, Christian reader, by any sin, the everlasting Easter joys of your heavenly protectress.

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Rather endeavor to augment them by your innocence of life, by your prayers and other good works. Then will your way of the cross through life be enlightened by the hope of a joyous resurrection and a happy meeting and reunion: a resurrection and a restoration to the glory of heaven, when God will wipe away all tears from your eyes, where death will be unknown, no sorrow, no complaining, no pain. May the almighty and merciful God grant us this blessing through the powerful intercession of our beloved Mother. Amen.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY ASCENDS TO HEAVEN IN SPIRIT WITH HER BELOVED SON.

FOR forty days the risen Saviour remained on this earth. During that time He appeared frequently to His apostles and other believing friends, and on one occasion to a multitude numbering five hundred. Decrees and ordinances, all replete with graces and blessings, were ordained and promulgated for the benefit of the young and rising Church. The apostles were confirmed in their faith, and strengthened in their love for their divine Master. The fullest powers were imparted to them, and unquestionable authority given to them to preach the Gospel to every creature. But what of the blessed Mother during these forty days? Did not Jesus visit her from time to time? May we not believe that He passed much of His time in her comforting company? Holy Writ is silent on this topic, probably out of respect to the humility of the Blessed Virgin, who kept these visits and sayings of her Lord, "pondering them in her heart." How the presence of her trans-

figured and glorified Son must have overwhelmed her loving heart with the keenest delight! How amply was she now repaid, how richly rewarded for her past love to Jesus, for the many sacrifices she had made for His sake, especially on the road to Calvary and under the cross! If such a foretaste of eternal happiness is so ravishing, how far beyond description must be the full and actual enjoyment of God's presence in heaven!

When the forty days had elapsed, the Saviour, accompanied by His disciples and several believers, went forth from Bethania to the Mount of Olives. At such a momentous time, where should the Mother of Jesus be if not in company with her beloved Son and His apostles and the pious women in Bethania, which town had been her second home ever since the time when Jesus had left Nazareth.

MOUNT OLIVET.

The prospect from the heights of Mount Olivet is one of varied beauty, and more suggestive of holy and precious recollections than any other spot in the world. Towards the east, the eye sweeps over the bold, bare outline of the mountains down into the valley of the River Jordan and the basin of the Dead Sea. This latter body of water may be seen between the broken lines of the hills, its glistening waves seeming in the bright sunlight like molten silver. Away beyond may be seen the Arabian mountains, whence the three wise men came who were called by the star to Bethlehem. To these mountains the clear atmosphere peculiar to the climate imparts a coloring of great beauty. Towards the west lies the Valley of Josaphat, whose very name and appearance are suggestive to every observer of death and judgment. There, too, lies the holy city of Jerusalem, in full view, with Mount Sion and Mount Calvary, the site of the Temple,

and the great tower of David. The whole of the Old and of the New Testament, the history of a hundred peoples whose ashes are mingled with the dust of the streets, an endless series of divine deeds of justice and mercy unroll themselves before the mind's eye of the spectator. Here the Saviour entered upon the painful path of His passion. Here again He stands now with His work accomplished. His Mother stands by His side. Once more He casts His gentle eye over His beloved Jerusalem, then over mountain, valley, sea, and river, and then in spirit He reviews the nations of the earth as they pass before His mind, generation after generation, till the end of time. He reviewed also the future history of His holy Church, and even of each individual soul, and finds that ever and above all else, a patiently and heroically borne cross leads always to triumphant victory, as in His own case now when He finds Himself glorified, admired, victorious on the self-same spot where He had been deserted by His apostles, abandoned by His Father in the hour of depression and agony; where He had been betrayed to His enemies by the kiss of a once loved friend.

How brightly and gloriously this coincidence, this mingling of humiliation and triumph on the same soil of Olivet, presents itself to the deeply agitated soul of the Blessed Virgin. How fervently she adored the mysterious ways of Providence! How clearly, in her prophetic vision, she foresaw the honor and glory, the reward and power, that would one day—indeed, for all days—attach to the hitherto despised cross of Calvary!

SURSUM CORDA!

Jesus now raised His hands, which still showed the mark of the nails, to bless His Mother and the disciples, who all knelt to receive His parting benediction. When

Mary raised her eyes to His countenance she saw His features glowing with a heavenly brightness, as His body began to rise from the earth and slowly to ascend towards the sky. And as He departed, He spread out His arms, solemnly blessing them all. At last a light cloud enveloped His receding form and shut Him out from the view of the eager observers. The blessed Mother did not remove her eyes till the last from her blessed Lord. It seemed as if her heart were torn away from earth and life and wished to raise itself and follow Him to whom it was so devoted in gratitude and love. Sentiments of mingled wonder, delight, and admiration pervaded her soul. There was, perhaps, a shadow of sadness and loneliness at this separation from her Jesus and at the prospect of coming years to be spent by her in loneliness on earth. But she suppressed every feeling of sorrow, and in its stead came a calmer longing for heaven. Which longing grew the more eager and intense as she dwelt on the pleasant thought that her divine Son was now beyond the reach of further affliction or persecution, and of contempt and ridicule from His enemies. She remembered that He sat enthroned in the glory which He possessed before the world was made.

This longing after her heavenly home became the more ardent and powerful, in proportion as the desire grew within her to witness the glory which her Son enjoyed. With the Apostle Paul she might have desired "to be dissolved and to be with Christ." (Phil. i. 23.) But there existed three powerful ties that were to hold her to this earth for some years, namely, the holy will of God, the welfare of the infant Church, and the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. These were indeed sacred and holy bonds in the estimation of her who had pronounced the act of resignation: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word."

COMFORTING PROMISE.

"And while they were beholding Him going up to heaven, behold two men stood by them in white garments, who also said: Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to heaven? This Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven shall so come as you have seen Him going into heaven." (Acts. i. 10, 11.) Promise full of comfort for the blessed Mother who was among those addressed! Her Son is in heaven, and He will come again glorious and triumphant! Promise full of comfort also for all men on earth who are of good-will, and who in reward for their fidelity to faith and duty will see in the Son of God, when He shall come, not the stern Judge, but will greet him as their Saviour, Rewarder, and Bridegroom.

But when the cross of the approaching Son of man will appear in the heavens, terror and despair will overtake and overwhelm those who, having left the narrow, thorny path of Christ and despised His precepts, have made their way to eternity over the broad and easy road of pleasure, sensuality, and forgetfulness of God. Christian reader, it lies with yourself whether you are to meet the Son of God as your wished-for Friend and King, or as your dreaded Avenger of goods and graces abused and neglected. Therefore beseech your compassionate advocate, that by her happiness at the ascension of Christ, she would obtain for you courage, perseverance, grace, and light, that you may tread the way of God's commandments, and finally come forward with the lamp of faith and love to meet your approaching Judge and Bridegroom. Assure her that you wish to imitate her in her longings for heaven and its manifold blessings. Poor, troubled soul, how anxiously thou attachest thyself to the cares, anxieties, vanities, and frivolities of this earth! How seldom, how tepidly, you look up to heaven, which is your

everlasting home! What sacrifices you make in order to come into the possession of the dust of the earth! How solicitous you are to add a few short years or even days to your earthly existence, while the precious goods of heaven, and the everlasting life of happiness and of love are seldom or never the subjects of your heart-wishes, of your prayers, or of your cares. O good and gentle Mother Mary, implant in my callous heart your ardent longings for heaven and for our blessed Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN AS QUEEN OF THE APOSTLES ON WHIT-SUNDAY.

MARY, QUEEN OF THE APOSTLES.

THE apostles and the other witnesses of the Resurrection after recovering from their surprise at the wonderful things they had seen and heard, came down from Mount Olivet and returned to Jerusalem, where, as The Acts of the Apostles inform us, they assembled to pray in a retired apartment,* the Blessed Virgin being with them. (Acts. i. 14.) Here they passed their time, "breaking bread daily" and receiving the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Thus they awaited the coming of that Holy Spirit who had been promised by the Redeemer, passing ten days in careful preparation. Observe here, Christian reader, how the blessed Mother seems to take the place among the apostles which was left vacant by the ascension of the divine Master. At the beginning of the Passion, when Jesus was taken captive, the terrified

* Probably the same room in which Our Lord had instituted the Blessed Sacrament.

disciples had dispersed in all directions. His reappearance on earth brought them once more around Him, and His presence kept them together. But was there not some reason to fear that they would again disperse, now that He had left them again, and it was certain He would not return? What would then have become of the designs of God and of the infant Church? But the venerated and blessed Mother of Jesus remained in their midst. Vested with all the prestige of God's Mother, with a wonderful holiness, extraordinary wisdom, and heroic fortitude, she was the means, before God, of so inspiring the disciples that they remained together, united by her benign influence, and by a common faith and by a common love for Christ her Son. Mary was here not only the heart of their little assembly, but she was also their head, for she became their teacher. Even at this late date, many important truths connected with the life of the blessed Master, especially regarding the Incarnation and His early life in Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth, may have been unknown to these future teachers of all nations. Who could have been better fitted to instruct them on these important truths than His own Mother, who had witnessed them and shared largely in them? Thus, in the absence of the divine Sun of justice, the mild and venerable Mother, in the very beginning of the Church, shone like the gentle, faithful moon, shedding about her, and on the members of the apostolic constellation, the borrowed light of the heavenly King.

MARY, THE BRIDE OF THE HOLY GHOST.

The days of Pentecost were approaching. The promise of the divine Teacher was soon to be realized. He had said: "But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things,

and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you." (John. xiv. 26.) It was with the consent and co-operation of the Blessed Virgin that the Holy Ghost had perfected the great mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. In her presence now and with her co-operation, the same Holy Spirit was pleased to accomplish the great work of transforming the hitherto vacillating apostles into the pillars of the Church and the foundation-stones of eternal truth.

The members of the young Christian Church had assembled about the Blessed Virgin Mary in a place of prayer in Jerusalem, in order to commemorate in a Christian sense and manner the festival of Pentecost, or the promulgation of the divine law on Mount Sinai, and to offer up to the Almighty God the sublime sacrifice of the Eucharist instead of the sacrifice of first fruits and animals as prescribed by the Old Law. "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak." (Acts ii. 1–6.)

But why should the Blessed Virgin receive the Holy Ghost? What effect was that divine Spirit to produce in her soul? Was she not "full of grace" from the time of her election? Yes, Christian reader, she was; and not only then, but at every moment of her life, she was a chosen vessel of the Holy Ghost by virtue of her character as Mother of God. She now receives the Holy Ghost as Mother of all the faithful, as Mother of the future Church. On this great day the holy apostles were endowed with the spirit of wisdom, fortitude, and knowledge, with the gift of tongues and power of miracles,

in order to make them competent for the discharge of their important mission upon earth. In the same way was the Blessed Virgin enriched with still greater graces, if possible, than hitherto, in order to enable her to fulfil her infinitely great and exalted duty of Mother of men in the midst of the holy Church until the end of time. Though a vessel be filled to the brim with water, one may still continue to pour into it. But the vessel not being able to contain it, runs over, and the overflow may be of use to others. Such is the case with regard to Mary's superabundance of gifts from the Holy Ghost. And in truth and fact, has not entire humanity in its spiritual poverty and destitution had recourse to Mary's superabundance of grace and merits, of wisdom and power for eighteen hundred years? And will not all future generations come in numbers equally great and eager to drink from this same inexhaustible fountain?

MARY, THE HEART OF THE CHURCH.

The "upper chamber" in Jerusalem is nothing else than the Holy Catholic Church in miniature. There is the chief head, St. Peter. There are the bishops in the persons of the apostles. There, too, we find the doctrines of Christ and even the divine ceremonial services. For the Acts of the Apostles assure us that "they were persevering in the doctrine of the apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts ii. 42.) But is this all? No. We must necessarily add: There, too, was Mary the Mother of Jesus. Any religious denomination in whose midst the Mother of Jesus is not enthroned and venerated is not the Church of Christ. It is the Catholic Church alone which has received this precious legacy from the hands of her divine Founder, and who has kept it faithfully and lovingly till

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the present hour. Rejoice then, Christian reader, and from the bottom of your heart thank God that you have the good fortune and happiness, the undeserved grace, to belong to that holy Church to which Jesus Christ, its Founder, has bequeathed, not only His sacred flesh and precious blood, soul, and divinity in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, but also His most beloved Mother, in order that she may be our Queen and protectress.

MARY, AN OBEDIENT CHILD OF THE CHURCH.

Although the Blessed Virgin was the Queen of the apostles, and was highly honored in the "upper chamber" of prayer, yet she heard and accepted with perfect humility the teachings of the apostles; subjecting herself to them in faith, hope, and charity, and recognizing in them the pillars of the Church and the dispensers of the mysteries of the Lord. In Peter, the Prince of the apostles, she sees and acknowledges the chief head of the Church. Christian reader, it is of vital importance, in these evil days of ours, that you lay well to heart the blessed Mother's sublime example on this point.

All the energies of sensuality and of falsehood are essaying to turn the faithful children of the Church from the successors of Peter and of the other apostles, namely, from the Sovereign Pontiff, from the bishops and the priests. Remain steadfast. Do not range yourself, even in appearance, on the side of Christ's enemies. If you are deprived of the presence of your lawfully appointed teachers, then pray privately in your own house, or in company of other faithful laity, to your divine Redeemer and ever-blessed Mother. In patience persevere in the faithful discharge of your duties, till the dawn of better days in your Church affairs.

But thou, O gentle yet mighty Virgin Mary, in these

troublous and desolate times, redouble thy prayers before the throne of God, augment thy protection, thy counsel, and thy consolations towards us. Preserve us all in the true faith, in unconditional union with the one, holy, catholic Church, with its lawful head and supreme pastor, with its bishops and priests. Obtain that these severe trials may become conducive to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Amen.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE CLOSING YEARS IN THE LIFE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

MARY AND JOHN.

REGARDING the latter years of our blessed Lady's life on earth, and as well as regarding her departure from the world, the Holy Scriptures maintain a strict silence. Hence we must depend entirely on historical tradition.

After the descent of the Holy Ghost, the apostles went forth into all the world to teach all nations, as their divine Master had ordered them to do. Mary, however, remained temporarily in Jerusalem at the house of St. John the Evangelist. Prayer and other works of piety constituted her favorite and almost exclusive occupation. The more the Church was extended, the greater was the increase in the crowds of pilgrims who as pious believers found it a pleasure and made it a duty to come to Jerusalem to visit the Mother of the Redeemer and to do her honor. Her very presence was so sweetly engaging and impressive, that even hardened sinners could not resist her silent appeal for their conversion. The words of consola-

tion uttered gently and affectionately by her pure lips, softened every asperity, allayed every evil passion, and inflamed the hearts of all with charity and a love of self-sacrifice. The apostles and evangelists in every doubt and perplexity had recourse to her, and the highly illumined Virgin imparted the wisest of counsel and the soundest of instruction. She was filled with a mother's love and a mother's solicitude for the whole Church and for each individual member; so that all persons in those years found in her all the help they needed. By this means, but more especially by her prayers, was she a great pillar in the early Church. Yet she was but seldom seen out, except in the gatherings of the faithful at divine service. Her favorite, indeed her only, walk was along the way of the cross as traversed by her Son when going from Jerusalem to Mount Calvary. In company with St. John, or perhaps some few pious women she would walk along slowly, praying and meditating, and fondly recalling each painful incident and gazing intently on every spot of the road that had been tinged with the precious blood of her divine Son. To her, as well as to many others of the early Church, these places were objects of deep veneration, well calculated to awaken in the minds of all sentiments of deep love and profound gratitude for an all-merciful and compassionate God. When she would reach the heights of Calvary and call to mind the sad and dreary hours she had passed in that gloomy spot on Good Friday, under the cross, and the words of her dying Son and Saviour, she would renew in spirit her noble sacrifice and awaken once more all her feelings of motherly love to Jesus and of child-like gratitude to God the Father. Daily she received, with ardent longings and the most intense love the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. What indescribable happiness she experienced in this intimate and actual union with her Son! What an overflow of

consolation was then imparted to her, what a superabundance of graces was given to the Church on these occasions!

MARY IN EPHESUS.

Many reliable writers of early Christianity inform us that the blessed Mother of God dwelt for a considerable time in Ephesus, a city in Asia Minor, where her adopted son and protector, St. John the Evangelist, was made bishop. We accept this opinion of writers whose authority and credibility deserve our attention. It is certain that the Christian congregation of that place ever cherished, for centuries after her death, a special reverence and affection for her, as if she had been, besides the Mother of God, a beloved friend and respected neighbor. In her honor the people of Ephesus built a sumptuous church, which was indeed "the first church of the Blessed Virgin in all Christendom." It was moreover a striking interposition of Providence that, four centuries later, in the year 431, her dignity and title as Mother of God were solemnly vindicated in a general council of the Church, held in this same city of Ephesus, where she had dwelt with her divine Son's "beloved disciple." But it may be asked what could have dissolved the sacred ties that bound her to the city of Jerusalem? Probably the early breaking out of the cruel persecutions against those who belonged to the Church, together with the urgent persuasions of St. John and the other apostles who besought her not to imperil her life, which was so necessary and so dear to the young and struggling Church. Perhaps, too, the same enemies who had taken the life of her beloved Son sought with no less cruelty to take the precious life of His Mother. How annoying and fatiguing must have been a journey so long and so dangerous for the venerable lady! How ill at ease and how lonely she must have

felt at her advanced age in the midst of strangers! How vividly the journey reminded her of her melancholy flight into Egypt, how painfully suggestive was the strange city of her exile in the land of the heathen! But in Egypt her dear Child was with her, and now she felt that she could fly from the city which reminded her so painfully of all that had been near and dear to her in her past life. In Egypt she was young and strong, now she was bowed down in years and sorrow. How often she must have cast a longing glance at the ships that sailed within view of the coast, their prows pointing towards Syria, and which could bring her to her distant home! In Ephesus, as in Jerusalem and Bethania, her very presence seems to have brought forth blessed fruits of faith and piety, if the flourishing condition of the congregations in those parts, as portrayed by St. Paul in his Epistles to these same people, is to be ascribed to her prayers, her example, and her teachings.

YEARNING FOR HOME.

Her sojourn in a foreign land begat in her soul not only a longing for her earthly home in Judea, but also much more for her heavenly fatherland. Yet she wished to see her own country once more before leaving this world, unless the holy will of God should decree otherwise. Her heart throbbed with desire to see the holy city once more, to pay another visit to the sacred places, to stand once again in the shadow of the holy cross on Mount Calvary.

This wish of the blessed Mother St. John regarded in the light of a command, and took upon himself the fond duty of caring for her life on the billows of the deep. But how could there be danger of shipwreck, when this "gentle Star of the sea" so calmly and brightly shed her

light across the surface of the ocean? After a rough and tedious voyage, whose asperities were softened only by the prospect of speedily reaching the home of her youth, the holy pilgrims arrived in Jerusalem. What a happiness for the Christians dwelling in that city! How consoling for St. James, its apostolic bishop!

LIVING WITH CHRIST.

How long the Blessed Mother lived afterwards in Jerusalem is not quite certain. But at all times and in every circumstance, in Jerusalem as well as in Ephesus, her life was hid with God in Christ, as St. Paul expresses it in the third verse of the third chapter of Colossians. Glowing with ardent love for Him, her heart was with Him day and night. Carried away by this holy love, this sacred yearning, she daily traversed the way of the cross. Each scene of Jesus' suffering rose up before the eyes of her pious soul, and again she united herself to Him in His every sigh, His every pain, His very death. Coming to Mount Calvary, she would rest at the foot of the cross, and with a mother's affection look mournfully towards God's beloved city, thinking of the dreadful doom that was soon to overtake and overwhelm it. None other among the saints possessed in so eminent a degree the gift of intuitive prayer, or foresaw so clearly and certainly the heavenly mysteries, as did the Blessed Virgin. But who is competent to express the miraculous and rapturous ecstasies to which she was exalted in this union with her beloved Son? If even St. Paul was carried up to the third heavens, and there heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter (2 Cor. xii. 3, 4), how much more closely to the throne of her divine Son may the holy Mother have approached in spirit! If it was permitted to St. Stephen to witness the heavens open, and

see the Son sitting at the right hand of the eternal Father, shall this same heaven be closed to the vision of its future Queen?

Still, Christian reader, too sublime and dazzling is the glory of her majesty, the beauty of her virtues, and the depth of her mysteries, for any mortal to pretend to depict, worthily and truthfully, the inner grace-life of the Mother of God. Let us rather humble ourselves at the feet of our beloved Queen, acknowledging to her that we have not intellect sufficient, nor appreciation enough for such greatness; that we know only our own lowliness and poverty; that we therefore rejoice the more at her sanctity and her merits, that we stand in need of both, and therefore beg her to grant us with motherly generosity a share in her privileges.

Although the whole life of the immaculate Virgin on earth was one continued preparation for death, yet she prepared herself in a still more special manner during the latter years of her life for her entrance into life eternal. Do not imagine, Christian reader, that in regard to the life to come the Blessed Virgin was as certain as her great merits would justify her in being. No, her deep humility would not allow her to base her hopes of future happiness on herself, but altogether on the mercies of God. Nothing but a reliance on God's mercy could ever have sustained her hope of salvation, when she remembered the great responsibility that rested on her in consideration of her many graces and her dignity.

How much more then, Christian reader, does it become your duty, frequently and seriously to meditate on death, and on the eternity that is sure to follow death. Alas, how carelessly, how thoughtlessly, men rush headlong towards eternity! How, like a thief in the night, death comes on unawares and finds them unprepared. Mortal man, in whatever period of life you may be at present,

write deeply in your heart the words of St. Augustine: "All men know that the day of death will come. Yet most men, if not all, seek to forget it. The last day is concealed from us, in order that we may utilize all days to advantage. It is too risky, therefore, for a man to look about him for means of salvation when the danger of death is imminent. Hence every Christian must watch lest the coming of the Lord should surprise him unawares."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN FALLS ASLEEP IN THE LORD.

THE incessant yearnings of the Mother of God for a speedy dissolution and an early reunion with her beloved Son resembled, during the present lonely period of her existence, the ardent longings she entertained in her early life for the coming of the long-promised Messias. What was there now to detain her in this world? With feelings of the deepest satisfaction she had seen the Church founded by Jesus Christ take deep root in every portion of the great Roman Empire, growing up vigorously and shedding the sweet and wholesome fragrance of its heavenly influence far and wide. Having seen the dearest object of her heart secured for all time, she often sighed from the bottom of her heart with David, her royal ancestor: "Wo is me that my sojourning is prolonged, my soul hath been long a sojourner." (Ps. cxix. 5.) Yet she never failed to submit her own will to the loving disposal of Divine Providence. The fire of charity which burned within her soul sought to force its way through the bodily prison in which it was confined. Hence it was not age or sickness so much as intense de

sire that gradually led the Mother of fair love towards her approaching death.

THE PILGRIMAGE ENDED.

It cannot be positively stated when and where, or amid what special circumstances the Blessed Virgin at last fell asleep in the Lord. However, we may with all certainty presume that the life of the pure, immaculate Virgin, of God's chosen progenitrix, of the happiest and yet saddest of mothers, was brought to a close without the usual painful and sad circumstances that attend the death of ordinary mortals, but rather in a gentle and easy manner, and in keeping with her immunity from the sin of Adam. In fact, we learn, from the most reliable writers of early Christianity, that it was an angel of the Lord who informed her of her approaching death, and that in three days she would appear before the face of her divine Son. We need not question this statement, knowing, as we do, that, during her previous lifetime, angels had been frequently sent with messages to the humble maiden of Nazareth. Moreover, many holy persons are mentioned in Scripture, who were miraculously notified of the time of their death. Certainly the Blessed Virgin must have replied to the angel's message on this occasion, in the same words that she used years before: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word."

We are also reliably informed that just about that time the apostles had assembled together from their remotest missions and were staying in Jerusalem. They all gathered about the death-bed of the Mother who had given them their blessed Master. Doubtless the Holy Ghost, or at least an angel from heaven, had thus called them together, that they might be present at this important

event in the history of the primitive Church, to see their beloved Lady once more before she would leave them, to receive her final maternal benediction, and, by witnessing her happy death, to inhale new ardor and courage for their future hardships on the mission.*

They stood in Mary's apartment, with their eyes intently fixed on the enraptured and peaceful countenance of their dying Mother. Their united prayers were interrupted only by the ill-suppressed lamentations that filled the house.

Interrupting for a few moments her communings with God, she raised her eyes, looked affectionately at the disciples of her beloved Son, thanked fervently the Almighty God for granting her this last wish of her expiring heart, greeted them kindly, and with a mother's solicitude advised and consoled them, and exhorted them to renewed zeal in the diffusion of the kingdom of God on earth.

The most deeply moved and the most inconsolable of all was her protector St. John. It had been his happiness to keep for so many years in his house this holy Ark of the New Covenant. He knew not how he could live when deprived of such a treasure. True, he rejoiced at the happiness and glory awaiting his adopted Mother, yet he could not withhold his tears, nor suppress his sighs. In the presence of all the other disciples the dying Virgin gave testimony to the fidelity of her guardian, and thanked him sincerely for his devotion to her peace and

* Should there be in any person's mind an unwillingness to attribute this gathering of the apostles to the intervention of supernatural agency, such person may explain it naturally, if he will recall to mind that the death of the Blessed Virgin took place soon after the martyrdom of St. James, bishop of Jerusalem, and that therefore the remaining apostles had come together for the purpose of electing his successor in the episcopal chair of that diocese.

happiness. Finally, she begged them all to remember her as their fond, devoted Mother, and assured them that she would not forget them when before the throne of God. So sublime and tender were her words about the joys of heaven, and especially the beatific vision of God, that all hearts glowed with love for their Creator, and burned with desire to be united with Him.

REST IN GOD.

Her voice grew weaker, but it was gentler, softer, and more of heaven. When she ceased to speak, she raised her protecting hands to bless her children, whom she was now leaving orphans. Then raising to heaven her eyes, still bright and beautiful in death, she saw the heavens open and the Son of man descending in a light, bright cloud. At this sight her countenance became majestic in its expression, her eyes beamed with interior sentiments of motherly affection, of mingled pride and humility, and her face glowed with color. She was wrapt in an ecstasy of adoration. While thus entranced, her pure soul, without sigh or struggle, was released from its bodily prison and winged its way to its Creator.

A solemn stillness ensued. Wonder and admiration rather than grief prevailed in the hearts of the spectators. Mary's features betrayed no signs of death. She lay in placid dignity and calm repose. A sweet fragrance like that from Paradise pervaded the death-chamber. Deeply moved at this solemn event, the apostles fell upon their knees and amid tears and sighs intoned the chanting of the Psalms, which they continued far into the night. It is stated that many sick, blind, and lame were brought to the death-chamber, and by piously and believingly touching the precious remains were restored to the full enjoyment of their health and strength.

On the following day a solemn funeral procession was seen winding along the quiet Valley of Josaphat, on its way to Mount Olivet. The precious remains of the Blessed Virgin, wrapped in the appropriate garments of death, and hidden from view by a profusion of fresh, sweet flowers brought by pious young people, was carried to its last resting-place. Even her very sepulchre had been transformed by the pious women of Jerusalem into a cheerful, fragrant grotto of flowers. But all earthly odors faded away and were lost in the heavenly fragrance emitted from the precious remains, cold and dead though they were. The apostles themselves carried the sacred body, tenderly and lovingly, to the grave. Amid solemn chant and fervent prayer, and the pious hope, on the part of all, that the body from which Jesus had taken His sacred humanity would not be permitted to know the corruption of the tomb, the sacred remains of our beloved Lady were laid gently down on a bank of roses within the quiet precincts of the tomb.

Three days and as many nights the apostles and crowds of the faithful tarried about the sepulchre, in alternate prayer and chanting of psalms. Heavenly chants which many of the bystanders heard resounding aloft in the skies were taken as an evidence that the precious remains of Jesus' Mother were guarded by legions of angels from the celestial court.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN'S GRAVE.

Christian reader, linger for a few moments with the angels and the apostles at the grave of your beloved Mother. From this solemn place cast a look backwards over the long and eventful life now at last brought to a close by Mary's recent death. Could such a life, enriched as it was with the precious stones of the most brilliant virtue, with the rare jewel of complete self-sacrifice and

submission to God, and with the purest gold of the brightest charity—could such a life have any other ending, any crown less bright, than was vouchsafed to Mary in her beautiful, painless death? Take such precaution, mortal man, take such precaution, that the evening of your life may be calm, cloudless, and free from anxiety. Do not defer the most important opportunities of both your earthly and eternal existence to the last uncertain hour of life. In the first place, and above all, remove all doubts, all hesitancy, uneasiness, and want of order in matters pertaining to conscience. If not on the moment, attend to this as soon as practicable, for delays are dangerous, often fatal, sometimes begetting impenitence. Besides, in the last sad, painful hours just previous to the Christian's death hell itself puts forth all its strength, and uses all its strategy to close the lips against prayer, and the heart against contrition and every sentiment of piety.

O loving Mother Mary, right heartily and sincerely do I rejoice at thy happy death, so precious in the sight of the Lord. I rejoice that in thy death thou didst realize the life-long wish of thy aching heart, for in thy death a crown was set upon thy life so rich in virtue and sacrifice. I rejoice, for in thy death and through thy death thou didst secure the possession of thy God, and of the throne prepared for thee in heaven by the side of thy glorious Son Jesus Christ. I also rejoice, O kindest of mothers! that in thy departure out of this world thou wast placed in the position and glory of heaven's Queen, in order to use this power and glory for the benefit of thy weak, abandoned children of earth. O mighty Virgin, obtain for us, by virtue of thy glorious death, a similar happy and peaceful death-hour. Stand by my death-bed, as thy divine Son, the holy angels, and the blessed apostles surrounded thine. O pray for us, poor sinners, now and at he hour of our death. Amen.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN IS ASSUMED INTO HEAVEN.

ALTHOUGH the Holy Scriptures do not mention it, although the holy Church has not yet raised it to an article of faith, and although we are not in possession of detailed satisfactory evidence as to the miraculous manner in which the assumption of the Blessed Virgin was accomplished, yet there cannot be a doubt but that, not only the pure soul of the blessed Mother of God was admitted into heaven, but also her immaculate body; for it had been the dwelling-place of the Most High, and the sacred Ark of the Covenant in the New Law. To a believing soul it is sufficient to know that this really took place, although Divine Providence has not been pleased to clearly enlighten us on this point, nor, indeed, on many others. In the first place, I shall relate to you, Christian reader, what the earliest Christian writers have left in their writings concerning the glorious mystery of the Assumption. Then I shall furnish you with the reasons why we may believe unconditionally this mystery; nay, must believe it, although no direct decision of the holy Church obliges us to do so.

THE EMPTY TOMB.

After the solemn and touching ceremony of laying the virginal body of our blessed Lady in the tomb, the apostles and other believers, as already stated, remained at the grave for three days. What kept them there? Their great love and profound respect for the Mother of Jesus would not permit them to think for a moment in

their hearts that this immaculate tabernacle of the Redeemer would be given over to corruption. They remembered vividly and joyfully the glorious resurrection of their divine Master on the third day. An interior voice, perhaps even a special revelation, informed them that Christ, who had Himself arisen, would be pleased to awake His highly favored beloved Mother also from the sleep of death. Deeply impressed with this conviction, they opened the grave on the third day. Or, if we choose, we may safely adopt another opinion given and held by many learned and pious writers. These teach that one of the apostles, having arrived in Jerusalem too late to see the remains of the Blessed Virgin, was overpowered with grief and disappointment. He begged that the stone enclosing the tomb might be removed just once more, to enable him to gaze for the last time on the beloved countenance of their departed guide and Mother. In expectation of this happy privilege, he had travelled incessantly, night and day, from his remote mission. Moved at his deep piety and earnest pleadings, the other apostles granted his wish.

In anxious expectation, and wavering between hope and fear, they lifted away the heavy stone. A sweet fragrance immediately came forth from the grave. A supernatural brightness arose and enveloped all present. The flowers that had surrounded the body revived and again assumed their most beautiful colors. But the fairest and brightest flower, the sacred remains of the Mother of Jesus, was not there. A cry of astonishment and joy fell from the lips of all: "She is risen, she is not here!" Yes, the Blessed Virgin had arisen from death, and with body and soul had been conducted into heaven. Such was the firm belief of the wondering apostles and their fellow-watchers. It would be absurd to suppose that robbers could have rifled the grave and carried away the

body; for the whole gathering of apostles and other friends had been continually on guard. Hymns of joy and exultation were now sung in honor of the glorified Queen of heaven. As the happy news spread far and wide, new courage and lively faith were awakened in the souls of all believers. Here the almighty God had plainly given incontestible evidence that He was near His holy and beloved Church, with His protection and grace, and ready and willing to reward the love, fidelity, and sacrifice of His friends.

PROOFS OF THE ASSUMPTION.

From the days of the apostles down to our own time it has been the unbroken universal belief of the whole Catholic world that the blessed Mother of God has been admitted to the presence of God, not alone in soul, but also with her pure and now glorified body. But, Christian reader, although you believe firmly and joyfully this miraculous assumption of your blessed Lady, yet it may not be superfluous, for a still better understanding of the mystery, for an increased faith in it, and perhaps as a help to defend it, to give the grounds on which this Catholic conviction is based. Briefly, then, I would lay before you, for your study and meditation, the following eight points:

(*a*) The festival of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin was evidently observed even in the very earliest years of Christianity as a joyful feast commemorative of this miraculous event. Many learned writers have made good attempts to prove that the feast was established by the apostles and celebrated in their time. It is certain that during the reign of the Emperor Constantine the Great, who died May 22, 337, this festival used to be celebrated in the East with great devotion and pomp. In the

Western Church, it has been a festival of the first class ever since the sixth century. Even from the very prayers used in the Mass and divine office on this day, it is clear that the Church commemorates the translation from earth to heaven, not only of the soul of our blessed Lady, but also of her sacred body.

(*b*) As early as the year 451, Marcian, the Emperor of the Eastern Empire, summoned Bishop Juvenalis to the court at Constantinople in order to get his opinion on this question; namely, whether the body of the Blessed Virgin was still in the grave at Jerusalem or not. The Emperor's intention was, if the body were to be found, to have it translated to the church recently erected in his capital by the Empress Pulcheria, and which was to be dedicated to God under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin. Bishop Juvenalis stated the tradition universally admitted in Palestine, namely, that the body as well as the soul of the Blessed Mother of God had been translated by angels into heaven. (Niceph. *Hist.* Book II.) In fact, at no period in Christian history has any one claimed to have seen any relic from the sacred person of Mary. Even in the Greek Church, where the authorities have always been extremely careful to discover, preserve, and expose to public veneration every relic deserving such honors, not a word has ever been said of any relics of these sacred remains.

(*c*) In the Western Church, the holy bishop, St. Gregory of Tours, also gives testimony in his writings, published about the year 550, of the assumption of the Blessed Virgin. Not many years later one of the most saintly of Popes and renowned of Church writers mentions the universal belief in this mystery. Pope Gregory the Great, who died on the 12th of March, 604, composed for the Mass celebrated in honor of the Assumption the following prayer: "We beseech thee, O Lord, that we

may obtain real assistance, through the solemn celebration of this day on which the Mother of God died indeed a corporeal death, but could not be detained in the bonds of death."

(*d*) The Greek Church considers this general belief so well founded, that in a council held in Armenia in the year 1342, the assembled members issued the following declaration: "Let every one know and understand the Church of Armenia holds and teaches that the holy Mother of God, by the power and virtue of Jesus Christ, was translated into the kingdom of heaven, both body and soul." Again this same Eastern Church, when repelling the calumnies which the so-called Reformers, Luther and Calvin and their followers, uttered against the Mother of God, declared in a council held in Jerusalem in the year 1672: "It is beyond all doubt that the Blessed Virgin Mary is not only a great and miraculous sign on earth, because although she brought forth God in the flesh and yet remained a virgin, but she is also a great and miraculous sign in heaven, because she was translated thither body and soul: for although her immaculate body was enclosed in the tomb, yet, like the body of Our Lord, after three days it was released and admitted to heaven."

(*e*) Death is the wages of sin. As God had wrought the greater miracle of preserving Mary from every stain of even original sin, it was eminently becoming that He should not omit a lesser miracle, and one expected from His justice, namely, to avert from Mary the wages of sin, death in its destructive form.

(*f*) This precious body was the miraculous source in which the body of Christ, the Victor over death, the grave, and corruption, was itself formed. How then could this virginal flesh fall a prey to death and corruption?

(*g*) As Mary had given her virginal body to the King

of glory to be His dwelling-place, it is right and proper that this same Lord should give His kingdom of eternal glory to be her resting-place. St. Bernard thus beautifully expresses this sentiment: "When the Lord came into this world, Mary received Him in the noblest dwelling on earth, in the temple of her chaste womb. Therefore, on this day has the Lord exalted her to an honorable throne in His heavenly kingdom." What human imagination can picture to itself the splendor with which our glorious Queen was carried up to heaven, the reverence and love with which the heavenly hosts met and greeted her, the songs of triumph amid which she was conducted to the presence of her divine Son, the affection with which He received her, and placed her above all other creatures.

(*h*) If it be objected that it is altogether new and unheard of for any member of the human family to be translated in body from this life on earth to heaven before the general resurrection of the flesh on the last day, we should recall to mind the case of the patriarch Enoch, who, according to the clear and undoubted testimony of Holy Scripture, was carried in body by the power of God from earth to heaven. Moreover, the prophet Elias was borne to heaven in a fiery chariot drawn by fiery horses.

These evidences and many others which might be adduced, and which may be found in Brennan-Businger's "Life of Christ," are sufficient to give to the doctrine of the bodily assumption of the Blessed Virgin a solidity and a certainty that cannot be given to any other fact in ancient history.

For this reason the renowned Pope Benedict XIV. has declared it godless, unintelligible, absurd, and foolish, to doubt this consoling, well-grounded doctrine. The Holy See abstains from defining the Assumption to be an article of faith. Happily it needs no formal declaration; for all Catholics believe it firmly and willingly.

CHRIST'S ASCENSION AND MARY'S ASSUMPTION.

There is, however, an essential difference existing between the triumphant ascension of Our Lord and the assumption of His blessed Mother. This difference is well described by St. Peter Damian, a renowned doctor of the Church. He says: "With the eyes of thy soul observe the Son ascending and the Mother carried. Thou wilt discover a manifestation of glory in the ascent of the Son, and the same in that of the Mother. For the Redeemer ascends to heaven in the power and dominion of His strength, as Lord and Creator, surrounded by the homage of the angels, but not aided by any help from them. But Mary is carried to heaven, and as a sign of her supereminent grace, under the escort and with the help of the angels, for it is grace and not nature that elevates her. Hence this day is termed Assumption, while Our Lord's day is styled Ascension. For power is something different from mercy, and to the Creator alone belongs the right to transcend by His own inherent power the forces of a nature created by His own hands. The entire glorious company of the heavenly spirits came forth to meet the ascending Saviour. With them were united the hosts of the souls of the just, whom Jesus was leading, and thus conducted by both in triumph to the Father, He sits in equal glory at the right hand of Majesty. The triumphal procession that came to meet the approaching Virgin is far more splendid and glorious. For as she was entering the palace of heaven, the Son Himself came forward, with the whole heavenly court of angels and just souls." (*Sermon on the Assumption.*)

Now is fulfilled completely the prophecy of the timid Virgin of Nazareth, which many years before she had pronounced in holy youthful enthusiasm: "Behold from henceforth, all nations shall call me blessed; for He that

is mighty hath done great things to me. He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble." (Luke i. 49.)

I, too, praise thee and call thee blessed, O glorious Queen of heaven. I, too, rejoice that thou hast been raised to a throne of everlasting glory. O that it may be permitted to me one day to see thee there, face to face, to glorify thee, and with all the angels and saints to love thee forever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE CROWNING OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN HEAVEN.

HITHERTO, Christian reader, we have studied the life of our blessed Lady on earth only. Now that she has disappeared from our earthly sight and entered into life eternal, and sits enthroned in light, dazzling to mortal eyes, how can you ask me, Christian reader, to describe her solemn entrance into the mansions of the blessed, her life of happiness in the presence of God, or her career of intercession and protection for her children on earth! Ask me not to do an impossibility. If no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, if it hath not entered into the heart of man to know, all that God hath prepared for the redeemed souls of ordinary men who have loved Him in this life, how can human language express the outward glory or the interior joy of Mary's soul in heaven? My feeble pen may write but a few feebler words on this sublime subject.

THE TRIUMPHANT ENTRANCE.

A joy greater than can be conceived by the mind of man fills all the holy spirits when any soul, after having escaped from earth, sin, and eternal perdition, enters into the joy of the Lord. What joy then must have reigned among these pure spirits, when the holy, precious, and beautiful soul of the Blessed Virgin met their view! Nay, even the body enclosing this fair soul was glorified in brightest beauty and loveliness—a new wonder-work of the almighty power of God. And this latest guest of heaven is now and will be for all eternity their mistress and queen. This new accession is the Mother of their God, whom it is their pleasure to contemplate and adore. And what joy and happiness for the Blessed Virgin herself to see these countless hosts of angels, and to admire their purity and interior fervent love for God! What a change from the past! What a contrast! On earth, she had lived surrounded by unbelief, indifference, and sin. Here she is encompassed by millions of sinless beings, whose every faculty, but more chiefly love, is directed to God. Yet as the feeble though beautiful light of the stars fades away before the bright effulgence of the coming sun, so does the otherwise dazzling brilliancy of the angels pale before the glory and majesty of the Son of God and of Mary, when He comes to meet His Mother. Oh, what a meeting! What a happy reunion! What an inestimable compensation for their separations on earth, for their meeting on the way to Calvary. Overpowered with joy, reverence, and maternal love, the Blessed Virgin may have sunk upon her knees and exclaimed: "My Lord and my God and my Son!" But Jesus lifted her up gently and, with a child's tenderness, allowed her to repose on His divine heart. What a sea of joy and ecstasy overflowed all when the divine Son led His Mother to the dazzling

throne of the eternal Father !—when the Father received her and greeted her as His most beloved daughter ! What joy to see the Holy Spirit, whose spouse she had become on earth, and whose spouse she is now to be for all eternity ! And then the happy meeting with St. Joseph, with her parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne !—the meeting and greeting of all those happy souls who owed their admission into heaven to the intercession of this merciful Queen ! O Christian reader, gather up and concentrate all the forces of your soul, in order to see and comprehend, at least as far as human faculties can go, the heavenly joy attending this glorious entrance into heaven, this reunion of just and holy souls.

MARY IS CROWNED.

In one of the joyful mysteries of our holy Rosary we salute our blessed Lady as a Queen crowned in heaven by the hand of God.

When the aged mother of Solomon appeared one day at the foot of his throne, that great potentate descended from his high place, advanced to meet his mother, bowed before her, and then led her by the hand to a throne upon his right. (3 Kings ii. 19.)

It was thus that an earthly king felt himself bound to honor publicly a mother who indeed had not been always true to her God, nor strictly faithful to the requirements of honor. But when the son is animated with sincere gratitude, is abounding in justice and divine love, as was the Son of God, how will such a son honor a mother so pure, so true, so self-sacrificing, so severely tried in sufferings as Mary. Was it not just and proper that she who had shared the cross and the crown of thorns, with their disgrace and suffering, should now share His dominion and throne ? Was it not fair and reasonable that

the immaculate one, who from among all creatures in heaven and earth was chosen to be the veritable Mother of God, should now be solemnly recognized and enthroned in heaven as the Mother of heaven's King? Was it not becoming that she to whom her divine Son when on earth was subject and obedient, should now in heaven have share in His dominion, and in the homage offered by all created beings?

But this crown is not a crown composed of gold and precious stones. No, it is formed out of those rarest and most precious graces and virtues which an all-merciful God had vouchsafed to the humble maiden of Nazareth. It consists in a garland of faith, hope, charity, fidelity, purity, and fortitude. For it was with such a wreath that Mary, by faithfully co-operating with divine grace, had crowned herself while on earth. The brightest and most valuable precious stones adorning this crown of honor are child-like love, reverence, and gratitude, such as the Saviour of the world even in heaven shows to His honored Mother, and such as He requires all children to show to their earthly parents, even when these are little deserving of the same.

Christian reader, it is within your power to set a jewel in this crown of the ever-blessed Queen of heaven. You have but to make frequent acts of veneration to her as her faithful and respectful child, to imitate her virtues, and out of love for her to preserve your purity and innocence of heart. Oh! what a happiness it will be for you in the next world if at the sight of her crown of honor you can say with truth, "I, too, have added a ray to all this brightness."

MARY'S HAPPINESS.

According to the teachings of the Church, as well as of Holy Scripture, there are, in heaven, different stages and

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degrees of happiness and glory. It would appear that a higher degree of this happiness and glory is made attainable, according as the capacities and activity of the blessed are developed and made more competent to enjoy the heavenly happiness. The intellectual powers are fitted to more thoroughly comprehend the unfathomable nature of God. The emotional faculties are fitted to appreciate and admire more inwardly the glory of the heavenly mansions, and of their inhabitants; but more especially the glory of God Himself. The will faculty is more and more fitted and enabled to yield itself up to God, and to become united with Him. From all this, you may conclude, Christian reader, that the happiness of the Mother of God in heaven surpasses all human conception or expression. For when she was on earth, did she not possess the profoundest knowledge of God and of His mysteries? Had she not the sublimest sentiments, the most exalted conceptions of divinity and of divine things? Did she not in the closest manner unite her will with the will of God? And now her chief reward and principal glory in heaven consist in the augmentation and development of these faculties of her pure soul. As the prophets had often foretold, the sufferings of the Blessed Virgin on earth were deep and boundless as the ocean (Sam. ii. 3). Great then as the sea, and greater still must her joy of heart be in heaven.

THE OCCUPATION OF MARY IN HEAVEN.

A suitable activity, either external or internal, bodily or mental, is an inborn necessity of our human nature. Even before the Fall our first parents were charged by the Creator "to dress and keep" the garden of Paradise. (Gen. ii. 15.) Now as human nature is not set aside nor even essentially changed when admitted to heaven, but

rather exalted and ennobled, the saints have occupations suited to their state. So, too, we can say of our beloved and victorious Queen of heaven, that her sojourn in heaven is one of heavenly occupations and enjoyments. She exercises, indeed, a twofold activity; one upward towards God, the other earthward towards men. St. John, who was the adopted son of Mary, beheld a wonderful vision on the lonely island of Patmos. He saw the Lamb of God on a holy mountain, "and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand having His name, and the name of His Father, written on their foreheads." These were a train of virgins who sang a new canticle of praise to the most high God. (Apoc. xiv. 1–3.) And who but the Mother of God, should be the Queen and the crown of this virginal train attending the immaculate Lamb? Adoration, therefore, of the thrice holy Lord, reverence and admiration of His power and majesty form the first, sublimest, and most exalting occupation of the heavenly Queen.

Consider, in the second place, Christian reader, the occupation which the Blessed Virgin exercises in an earthly direction in favor of the souls of men who are her children. There is no soul existing on earth for whom Mary does not entertain a mother's solicitude and affection. How many prayers and supplications, how many tears and hymns of praise, how many sighs and lamentations, how many songs of joy and of thanksgiving, ascend every day and hour to the throne of grace on which our powerful Queen and Advocate is seated! To which of these supplications sent up from a suffering, struggling soul in search of sanctification, would she turn a deaf ear? Then there are the battles of the Church, its persecutions, its terrors from the ungodly. To listen to all who need assistance, to carry their prayers before the throne of her divine Son; such is the occupation of our merciful

Mother, as long as there shall exist on earth suffering but confiding children of men.

O exalted Queen of heaven! When in spirit I see thee on thy throne of power and glory, at the side of thy divine Son, raised far above angels and saints, must I be appalled and repelled by thy majesty? Oh, no, for even in thy most inconceivable and inaccessible heavenly glory, thou art still, and will always remain, my loving, tender Mother.

How consoling then it is for me to know the comforting doctrine of that devout client of Mary, St. Alphonsus Liguori. He teaches that thou, O Mary, notwithstanding the glory in which thou art enveloped cannot forget us miserable beings; that thou hast not lost sympathy for us, poor children of Eve, but rather that thy compassionate love for us has been immeasurably augmented. Oh, how these words give new live to my waning hope and confidence! How joyfully and hopefully I now look up to heaven, and to heaven's Queen! to thee, O my Mother! The nearer and closer thou art brought to God, to the Source and Fountain of all salvation, the more competent thou art to direct its graces, those saving streams of eternal life. Now thou knowest better than when thou wast on earth our deep and crying miseries.

I, too, now throw myself before thy throne. In humility and confidence, I deposit in thy maternal bosom my difficulties, my wishes, and my prayers. Look down upon me, O my Queen, mistress, and Mother, look upon me with thy eyes of mercy and compassion. Think ever of me. Do not cease to pray for me, to care for me, till I shall have the happiness to see thee in thy glory, and to love thee forever and ever in eternity. Amen.

O almighty and all-merciful God! Now that I have with a joyful heart considered the wonders of Thy wisdom and grace as manifested in the selection, in the life, in the

sufferings, in the death, and in the glory of the ever-blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, I humbly return Thee thanks for all the graces which Thou hast been pleased, out of love for us sinful men, to grant to her. I thank Thee for the kindness, condescension, and mercy with which Thou hast favored us in giving us such a Mother and such an advocate before Thy throne. All these indescribable prerogatives of the blessed Mother, as well as her own personal virtues and merits, I offer to Thee, O God, as a pleasing and effective oblation of atonement for my sins and for those of my fellow-men. Oh! I implore Thee, for the sake of heaven's Queen full of grace and glory, to be merciful to us in life and death. Amen.

DEO GRATIAS.

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